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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

MAY
1990

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Address: 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU, United Kingdom. All subscriptions, back-issue orders, story submissions, general correspondence, books for review, and enquiries about advertising should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions: £23.00 for one year (12 issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal orders should be crossed and made payable to *Interzone*. Overseas subscriptions are £25.00, payable by International Money Order. American subscribers may pay by US dollar check – \$40 (sea mail) or \$48 (air mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £230 (UK); \$400 or equivalent (overseas); \$480 or equivalent (overseas airmail).

Back-issues are available at £2.30 each in the UK (£2.50 each overseas), postage included. (US dollar price: \$4 sea mail or \$5 air mail.) All issues are still in print except numbers 1, 5 and 7. Order them from *Interzone's* main address.

Submissions: unsolicited stories of 2,000-6,000 words are welcomed, but they should be sent singly and each one must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of adequate size. Persons overseas please send a disposable manuscript (marked as such) and two International Reply Coupons. We are unable to reply to writers who do not send return postage. No responsibility can be accepted for loss or damage to unsolicited material, howsoever caused. All submissions should be sent to the magazine's main address.

interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 35
May 1990

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Cover by David Hardy

Published monthly.
All material is © *Interzone*, 1990

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by Acorn Web Offset Ltd, Bradford

Trade distribution through Diamond-Europress
Sales & Distribution, Unit 1,
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,
14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER
(tel. 01 407 5447)



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Interface

David Pringle

Interzone is now a monthly. All being well, the next issue (dated "June 1990") will be out in early May, then seven more issues should follow before Christmas. We've been encouraged to take this big step by three factors: (1) the availability of good material to publish, certainly enough to fill twelve issues a year; (2) the advice of our newtrade distributors, who believe that a monthly schedule will enable the magazine to become more "visible" in newsagents' shops and hence to gain a greater sale per issue; and (3) the support of you, our readers: well over 80% of those who responded to our readership survey stated that they would be willing to buy a monthly magazine.

The response to our recent questionnaire was in fact very large – we've been struggling to assess hundreds of forms this past couple of months – and we're gratified. Thank you all very much. Altogether, we received 515 replies by the end of January 1990, representing a better than 25% response rate from our 2,000 subscribers – or representing a 5% response from our total readership (if one assumes that readership to be about 10,000 strong, which we believe is the case: this figure will undoubtedly grow as we settle into a monthly schedule). What follows is a breakdown of some of the results from the survey.

1990 INTERZONE ANNUAL AWARDS

As usual, we asked subscribers which of the stories, illustrations and articles published in *Interzone* last year they liked most – and which they liked least. To arrive at the scores given below we analyzed 230 ballot forms in detail. Unfortunately, it proved impractical to analyze all 515 readers' forms for fiction, art and non-fiction preferences (however, we are in the process of studying the remaining forms for the other information they contain). Then we subtracted all the negative mentions from all the positive ones. On this basis, the clear winner in the fiction category was **Brian Stableford**; and the winner among our artists and illustrators was, for the second year running, **SMS**. Each has now received a modest cash prize. Here are the detailed results for the fiction (issues 27-32 inclusive):

1)	"The Magic Bullet" by Brian Stableford	116
2)	"The Death of Arlett" by Barrington Bayley	107
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6)	"Through" by Ian R. MacLeod	88
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10)	"Listen" by Ian McDonald	81
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12)	"Tommy Atkins" by Barrington Bayley	76
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14)	"Twitch Technicolor" by Kim Newman	74
")	"To the Letter" by Bob Shaw	74
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")	"Green and Pleasant Land" by David Redd	62
22)	"Driving Through Korea" by Ian Lee	60
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25)	"Visiting the Dead" by William King	55
26)	"Game Night at the Fox & Goose" by Karen Fowler	51
")	"Other Edens" by John Gribbin	51
28)	"Cronus" by Marianne Puxley	47
")	"Before I Wake" by Kim Stanley Robinson	47
30)	"Meeting the Author" by Ramsey Campbell	46
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32)	"The Outside Door" by Lyle Hopwood	42
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37)	"Generation Gap" by Charles Stross	14
38)	"Chaos Surfari" by Rudy Rucker & Marc Laidlaw	-22

INTERZONE'S MOST POPULAR WRITERS

Our congratulations to **Brian Stableford**, and also to the runners-up. As you can see, in second and third place there was almost no difference at all between **Barry Bayley** and last year's poll winner, **Eric Brown**. It happens that we have new stories by our top two, Messrs Stableford and Bayley, in

this first monthly issue of the magazine (and we're also delighted to have an interview with the latter). There will be more from both of them in coming months, and we hope to have a new story from **Eric Brown** too – he has been at work on a novel recently, which has curtailed his short-story writing. Other high-scoring authors who definitely have new stories coming very soon in these pages include **Greg Egan**, **Ian R. MacLeod**, **Ian Lee**, **Richard Calder**, **Keith Brooke** and **Kim Newman**.

We also have a new story upcoming from **Charles Stross** – certainly his best yet, we feel – and this leads me to make the usual caveat, namely that a story popularity poll such as the above should not be taken too solemnly. It's a beauty competition rather than a serious literary contest (if there can ever be such a thing), and we continue to stand by all the stories we publish – even those which come bottom, or close to bottom, of an annual poll. We wouldn't have accepted them in the first place if we didn't find merit in them.

ARTISTS AND NON-FICTION CONTRIBUTORS

There isn't space here to list full details of the artists' and non-fiction writers' poll results, but the top dozen illustrations or sets of illustrations (out of a field of 36 in the year 1989) were as follows:

1)	SMS ("Listen," #32)	90
2)	Iain Byers ("The Magic Bullet," #29)	87
3)	Mark Salwowski (cover, #32)	79
4)	David Hardy (cover, #31)	76
5)	Jonathan Coleclough ("Gravegoods," #31)	73
")	Keith Scaife (cover, #30)	73
7)	SMS ("The Enormous Space," #30)	71
8)	Barbara Hills ("The Death of Arlett," #32)	70
9)	SMS ("Generation Gap," #31)	68
10)	SMS ("Chaos Surfari," #28)	61
11)	Barbara Hills ("Meeting the Author," #28)	56
12)	SMS ("Soft Clocks," #27)	54

Our two most popular illustrators, **SMS** and **Iain Byers**, will be with us again next issue, as will **Barbara Hills**. And of course the present issue has a cover painting by our second-most-popular cover artist, **David Hardy**. Back to the poll: the top half-dozen non-fiction items (out of a field of 14) were:

1)	Brian Stableford on "The Way to Write SF"	120
2)	Brian Stableford on Stephen R. Donaldson	103
3)	Michael Moorcock interview (Colin Greenland)	100
4)	J. G. Ballard on his 10 favourite sf movies	96
5)	Brian Stableford on Douglas Adams	86
6)	Thomas M. Disch on Whitley Strieber	81

Continued on page 73

Vacuum Diagrams

Stephen Baxter

Paul opened his eyes. His body ached. He lay face-down on a surface that glowed with white light. Grass, or fine hair, washed over the surface.

What is this place? How the hell did I get here? And...

What's my name?

His face grew slick with sweat; his breath sawed through his mouth. He perceived the shape of answers, like figures seen through a fog. He writhed against the shining ground.

The answers floated away.

A meaningless jingle ran around his mind: "We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here..."

The grass vanished. He waited, hollow.

Three men walked slowly through Sugar Lump City. Paul trailed Taft and Green, their urgent talk washing past his awareness. The sights, sounds and smells of the new City poured into his empty memory.

The embryonic street was lined with blocky buildings of foamed meteorite ore. Most of the buildings were dark, silent. Paul passed a construction site. Huge machines with ore spouts like mouths clawed aside meteorite debris and sprayed out floors and walls. The cold air was filled with dust, the stink of machine oil – and an incongruous tang of fresh-cut wood. Four workmen stalked around the site, shouting at the huge devices which did their bidding.

Taft and Green had paused at the knee-high lip of a light well. Paul joined them and peered into the well. The exposed surface of the Sugar Lump, twenty feet down, was a shining disc. A beam of light thrust straight up from the well and splashed against curved mirrors above their heads, illuminating the surrounding streets.

Shadows passed beneath the exposed plane like fish in a light-filled pond.

The sky was blue-black. Above the City's thin layer of air Spline warships prowled, visibly spherical.

Paul felt he was floating, suspended between mysteries above and below.

"Coexistence with the Xeelee," Taft was saying. "That's what the colony is about. The meteorite impact which smeared rock over this Face of the Lump was a miraculous break. By terraforming this region and colonizing it we can prove to the Xeelee we don't have to go to war with them." He was a tall, heavily-built man of about forty; the well's under-

lighting gave his bearded face a demonic power, and when his black eyes fixed on him, Paul felt a psychic shock – almost as if Taft had punched him...

"And isn't your mysterious waif here going to endanger that?" Taft demanded.

...And one day, Paul realized, this man would try to kill him. He edged closer to Commander Green.

Green interposed his short, blocky frame between Taft and Paul. Well light glittered from his ornate Navy epaulettes. "Your colonization project isn't under question at present, Dr Taft," he said briskly.

"Isn't it?" Taft raised bushy eyebrows. "Then call off your Spline war dogs. Spend your resources on my terraforming efforts down here."

Green spread calloused hands. "Let's stick to the point, shall we? You know I don't have the authority to call off the exclusion fleet. And those who do are unlikely to withdraw as long as there's so much mystery, so much threat associated with the Sugar Lump."

Taft snorted. "Threat? The government acts like a bunch of superstitious old women every time the Xeelee are mentioned. Look, Green, we've made a hell of a lot of progress. We've established that the Lump is an artifact, fabricated from Xeelee construction material –"

"And that's about all you have established," Green said with a touch of steel. "Despite the money you've spent so far."

"Commander, Xeelee construction plate isn't tissue paper. You can't just cut a hole in it."

"I know that. So it seems to me that Paul here – with his proven non-local perception abilities – is our best hope of getting some hard data." He winked at Paul. "What I fail to see is what threat Paul represents to you."

Taft stared at Paul, and again Paul was flooded with a nameless fear. "I won't discuss this in front of the boy," Taft said.

Paul worked to keep his voice level. "I'd like to hear what you have to say. And I'm not a boy, doctor. Physically I'm twenty years old."

Green grinned, showing even teeth. "Good for you."

"Damn it, Green, we don't know anything about this – boy – of yours. He's found in a fouled, ill-fitting pressure suit on the exposed Face at the edge of the City. Nobody knows who he is, or how he got there – including Paul himself, so he says –"

"His amnesia is genuine," Green broke in. "And as to how he got to the Lump – Taft, have you ever travelled on a Spline ship?"

Taft glared at him. "Do I look like a Navy goon?"

"A Spline warship," Green said patiently, "is a living creature. A sphere miles across. Its human crew occupy chambers hollowed out of the stomach lining. It's rather like being swallowed... A Spline ship is a big, complex, disorderly place. If Paul was a stowaway he won't have been the first —"

"He's an unknown," Taft insisted. "And by introducing him into this situation we incur an unknown risk."

"But what's beyond question is his bizarre, quantum-mechanical perceptive faculty. He represents an enormous opportunity."

Taft folded his arms and stared into the light well. "Suppose I refuse to cooperate?"

"I have sufficient authority to force you, frankly," Green said quietly. "Officially this is a war zone."

"I'll go over your head."

"I could have you arrested. Requisition your staff. Doctor, you haven't much choice."

Slowly, Taft nodded. "All right, Commander. I don't have any choice. For the present." And he shot another savage glance at Paul.

"I'm glad we agree," Green said drily. "Now, I believe you've a plan to have Paul taken to an Edge. That seems a good idea."

Taft nodded reluctantly. "And if necessary we could go on to a Corner Mountain."

"We?" Green asked suspiciously.

Taft indicated the construction site a few yards away. The four workmen had gathered around a machine which had shattered a nozzle against a stubborn lump of rock. "You can see how busy we are," Taft said. "I'm not going to sacrifice my schedules for this — venture. I'll accompany the boy myself."

The four workers sang softly as they hauled at the broken nozzle. Paul strained to hear their words, struck by an unaccountable feeling of significance.

Green said carefully: "Of course I'll escort you both."

"As you wish."

"Well, shall we start?"

The words of the work song drifted through the cold air: "We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here..."

Paul stood transfixed. The words echoed around his head.

Green touched his arm. "Paul? Are you okay?"

Paul turned with difficulty. Green's lined face was reassuring. "That song," Paul said. "What does it mean?"

Green listened for a few seconds, then chuckled. "Paul, soldiers and sailors have been singing that for centuries. Whenever they're forced to do something they don't particularly like. The tune's called 'Auld Lang Syne'." He searched Paul's face. "Have you heard it before?"

"I...don't know. Maybe."

Green smiled sadly. "Come on. Let's catch up with Taft before he has us thrown off the Lump."

Green had told Paul about the Xeelee. To all intents and purposes the Xeelee owned the universe. They moved through space on their vast projects like ships over the surface of an ocean. And humanity, emerging from Earth, had found itself competing for room with a hundred other junior races.

In the early days, Green had said, two races — the

Squeem and the Qax — had laid waste to Earth with Xeelee-based weapons.

Humanity hadn't much liked the experience.

Over centuries and a hundred battles, mankind had moved into a position of something like dominance over its peers. And had begun to confront the Xeelee.

Green showed Paul images of devastated worlds over which Xeelee ships folded hundred-mile-wide wings. "We aren't winning too many battles," Green said grimly. "It's led some to a vague pacifism. Like our friend Taft. But things will change." He had grinned infectiously. "Oh, yes. We'll win eventually."

Paul wondered helplessly how anyone could be so certain about anything.

Taft escorted them to a car at the edge of the City. The air here seemed colder and thinner. Raw meteorite material, scorched and fragmented, crunched under Paul's feet. On the horizon the Face of the Sugar Lump lay naked, as still and flat as a sea of light — a sea which stretched thousands of miles until it plummeted over an Edge, as if over some huge waterfall of photons.

Two cables ran over the debris and out over the Face. "We've laid cables across all the Lump's Faces, and along the Edges," Taft said with an ironic smile. "We've wrapped up this huge mystery like a Christmas parcel, eh, Paul?" He opened up the car. It was a cylinder about forty feet long which clung like a glassy insect to its cables. Most of the hull was transparent, and it contained two rows of five large seats which were suspended from complex sets of gimbals. Taft helped Paul settle; straps were passed over his shoulders and around his waist, giving him a vicarious sense of security.

Taft took a seat near the front end of the car, before an instrument panel which centred on a small joystick. Taft pushed the stick forward and, with a jolt, the car began to pull itself along the cables.

They crawled out of the City's dome of atmosphere. The sky's deep blue faded, exposing hard stars. Spline ships drifted past the stars, diamond sharp.

The dark meteorite material grew sparse, and soon they were sailing smoothly over a glowing ocean. Occasionally shadows, faint and miles across, washed from horizon to horizon.

Taft opaqued the hull, turning the car into a comfortable bubble of normality. Paul clung to his straps and settled into an uneasy sleep.

Light returned in a flood. Paul snapped awake... and screamed.

His chair had swivelled back on its gimbals. The nose of the car had tipped up through at least ten degrees. Outside, the Sugar Lump had tilted too. He was falling backwards —

Green stood before him. "Paul. Stop it. You're perfectly safe."

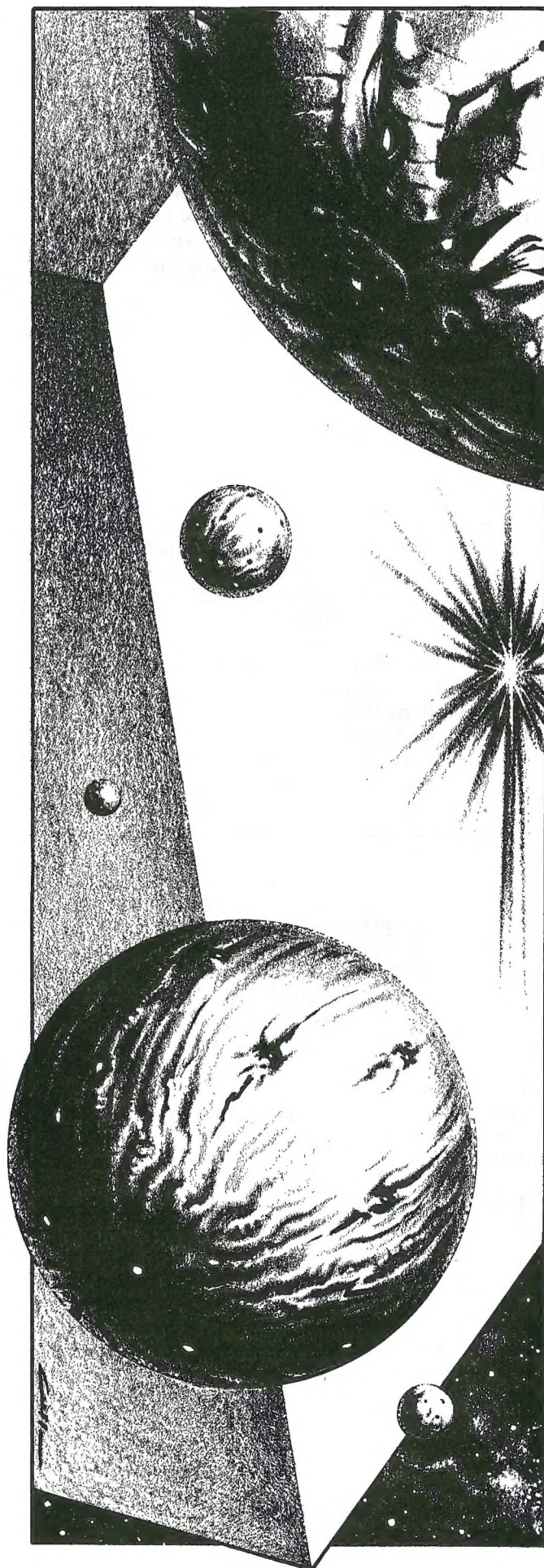
His throat was tight; he gulped for breath. "What's happening?"

He heard Taft laugh. "I've told the damn kid what to expect on this trip."

"Then tell him again," Green snapped. He turned and, clinging to handholds, made his way to the car's small galley area.

Taft reclined comfortably in the drive chair. He was

Paul twisted away. "I don't want to be uncertain,



Illustrations by Kevin Cullen

Commander. I'm frightened. I don't even know my real name."

Green grasped his shoulders. "Look, Paul, you are a puzzle to us. There's no point pretending otherwise. But the parts of the puzzle have to be connected. Where you came from must be connected with the way you are. And by doing this thing, by extending your talent to its limits, I believe you're going to discover more than what the Xeelee's up to inside the Sugar Lump. I believe you'll discover yourself."

Paul found himself shuddering. He tried to concentrate on the straps around his waist, the reassuring hands on his shoulders.

"Yeah," Taft said slyly. "Or maybe you'll discover you're nothing more than a vacuum diagram. What about that, eh, Paul?"

"A what?"

"Shut up, Taft."

"Come on, Commander. If this is a revision class, then let's revise it all." Taft stepped up to stand before Paul, grinning, brittle with bitterness. "You told me how you took Paul up to the Spline fleet, put him through a crash course on how to be human. Well, what about your quantum physics, Paul? Remember Feynman diagrams? Those cute pictures which show particles intersecting, living, dying?"

"Taft..." Green growled.

"Well, now, here's a remarkable little interaction. From out of nowhere pop three particles – a pion, a proton, and an antineutron. Of course conservation is violated all over the place – but thanks to the uncertainty principle nothing is absolute in this universe. I presume that's the concept our naval friend was groping for just now. And then the diagram closes up. The three particles recombine – they disappear back into the vacuum again, and conservation is reasserted. What a relief!

"But what really happens is that the antineutron is created at that final impact and moves back through time to initiate the creation of other particles! Bizarre enough for you? And so this particular Feynman picture is a closed loop. A vacuum diagram. The particles come from nothing and return to nothing." He grinned. "We're here because we're here because –"

Green raised one massive uniformed arm, pushed Taft away easily, muttered something Paul couldn't hear.

Paul closed his eyes, hoping to make the incomprehensible universe disappear into the vacuum from which it had sprung.

The approaching Edge was a knife-blade across the stars.

The car climbed the one-in-one slope ever more slowly, finally stopping a hundred yards from the rim. "Come on, Paul," Green said. "We walk from here." Briskly he helped Paul seal himself into a light, one-piece pressure suit. "And go easy. Remember we're that much further from the Lump's centre of mass; gravity is only about half what it is in the City."

Paul climbed through the car's membrane-like airlock. A handrail had been bonded to the surface a few yards from the car. Paul stumbled towards it. The apparent forty-five-degree slope was without purchase, and his motions felt slow and dreamlike, as if he were underwater.

Clinging closely to the rail he turned and surveyed the Sugar Lump.

Beneath his feet was a hillside of glowing glass. Shadows bigger than cities moved through it. Paul knew the Face was a square six thousand miles to a side, and he had half-expected to see details of far Edges and Corners from this vantage point; but beyond a few hundred miles the surface collapsed in his vision into a single, shining line of light. Sugar Lump City was a low dome of blue, improbably clinging to the centre of the line.

"Paul," Green said softly. "Look up."

Paul craned his neck. A Spline warship swooped overhead, no more than ten miles from the Edge. Paul could make out valley-sized wrinkles in the fleshy sphere, weapon emplacements twinkling in deep pocks. Finally the warship sailed over the Edge of the world, rolling grandly.

"They know we're here," Green said. "That was a salute roll."

His voice seemed to come to Paul from far away. A sense of distance swept over him; it was as if he were shrinking, or as if the universe were receding in all directions.

"Paul? ... Are you okay?"

"What's wrong with him? Damn it, the kid's a liability."

"Take it easy, Taft. Sometimes this state of semi-faint is a prelude to his heightened awareness phases. Come on, help me get him to the Edge."

The words swam by like fish. Green and Taft stood to either side of him, grasping his arms. They were figures of wood and paper, moving with dry rustles. The light of the Lump burned through them.

At last they stood in a line on the rim of the world. The Edge was an arrow-straight ridge, with the two identical Faces falling away on either side. It was like standing on the roof of some huge house. Cables had been laid along the Edge; a second car clung to them. Bundles of maintenance equipment had been fixed to the surface close to the car site.

"I hope this trip was worth it," Green said, panting.

Taft barked with laughter. The sound was like a dry leaf crumpling. "Well, you asked for my guidance and you got it. Obviously the stresses on the material are higher here than close to the centre of a Face. So if your wonder boy is going to gain access he has as good a chance here as anywhere. Watch out for the Edge itself, though. It's sharp as a knife, down to the finest limits we can perceive."

"No," Paul said.

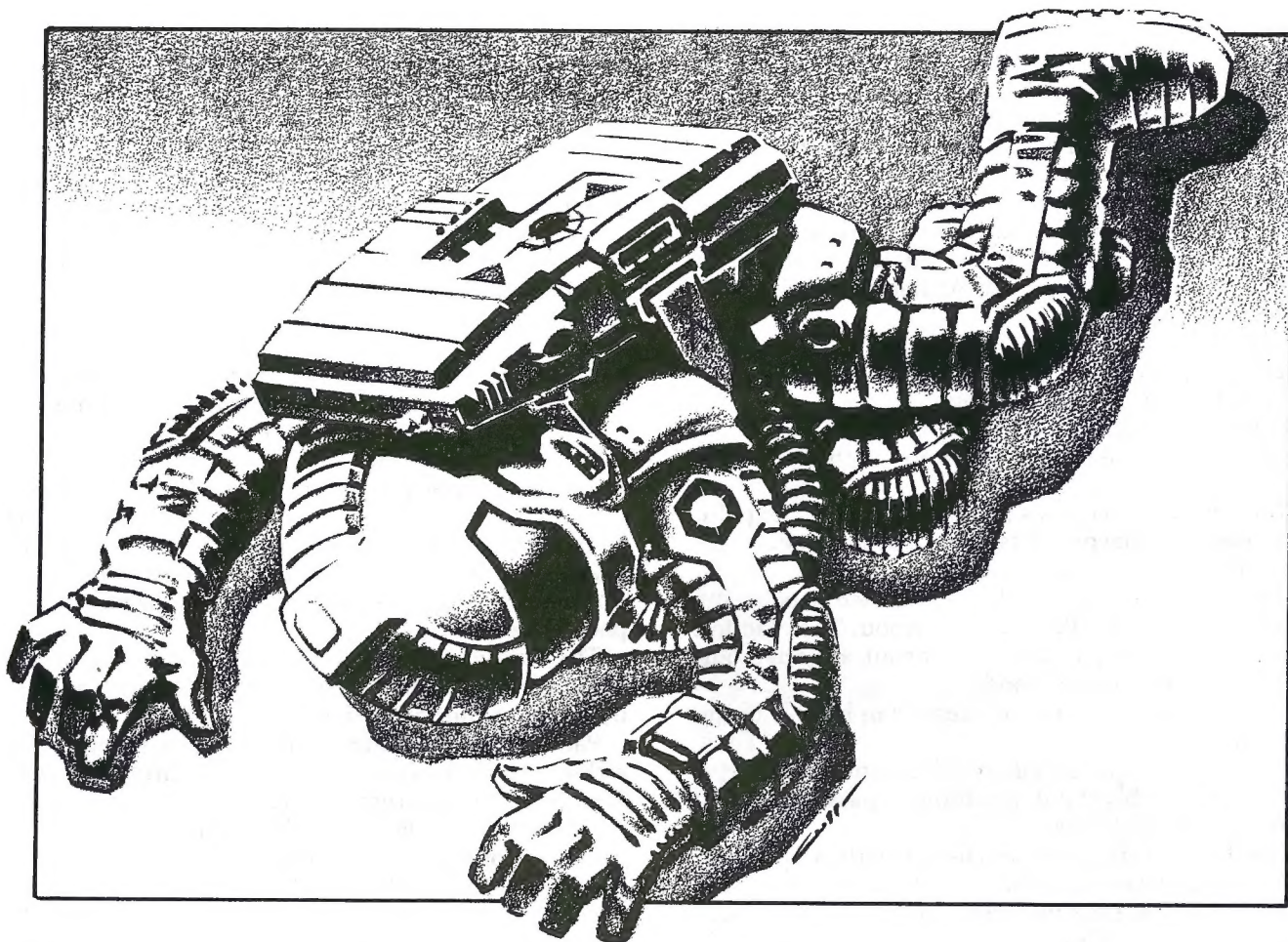
Green and Taft stared at him, releasing his arms. With the loss of physical contact they became still more insubstantial, receding from his vision like ghosts.

He knelt awkwardly and ran a gloved finger along the Edge. The stuff was soft; it rippled. It was like running a hand through a fine, multi-coloured grass.

Words like "sharp" were meaningless, of course; wooden words used by macro-men.

Green had given him the language to understand what he was perceiving: that this was the fundamental level of reality, the grain of quantum-mechanical probability wave functions.

An event was like a stone thrown into a pond; probability functions – ripples of what-might-be – spread



out through space and time. Macro-men might see the pale shadows where the waves were thickest.

And that was all.

Their hard language of "particles" and "waves" and "here" and "now" reflected their limited perception, stony words to describe shadows. But he, Paul, the boy with no past, could sometimes see the entire surface of the pond – and even catch hints of the depths which lay below.

He watched wave functions ripple away from the Edge, diminishing softly into prismatic shades of improbability, and felt his consciousness drawn out like a sword from its scabbard. He looked down at his body, bent awkwardly in its ill-fitting pressure suit; at the two stick men standing over it, obviously blind to the kaleidoscopic probability sparkles all around them.

The Face of the Sugar Lump was a window. He drifted through it.

He floated like a snowflake, wafted by probability winds. The Sugar Lump was full of wonders.

Here was an array of crystals which would grow at a touch into a fleet of a thousand nightfighters, unfurling glistening wings like dark butterflies. Twist this artifact just so and a city would unfold in a storm of walls and ceilings. Point this other at a star – and watch it collapse softly into nova.

And here, rank on rank of shadowy forms, were Xeelee themselves, features smoothed-over and indistinct, embryonic.

The Sugar Lump was a seed pod.

Something watched him. Paul twisted, scattered his being like diffusing mist...

Call it the antiXeelee.

It was as old as the Xeelee race, and as young. Inside the vessel men called the Sugar Lump – and, simultaneously, within a million similar vessels scattered through the galaxies – it waited out aeons, brooding.

The antiXeelee took Paul as if in the palm of a hand. Paul tried to relax. The gaze was all-knowing, full of strength...but not threatening.

Gently he was shepherded to the gleaming walls and released.

He opened his eyes. And moaned.

He was back in the world of the stick men.

Green's face, lined with concern, hovered before him. "Take it easy," he said. "We've brought you inside the Edge car." He slid a hand behind Paul's neck, tilted his head forward and helped him sip coffee. "How do you feel?"

Paul felt the softness of the seat beneath him, saw the warm brown light of the car interior. Beyond the windows the glow of the Sugar Lump seemed different. Harsher? Sharper? Shadows raced through the interior. "What's happening, Commander? Where's Taft?"

"At the controls of the car. He got a call from his team at the City site; some kind of problem." Green leaned over him hungrily. "Paul. You were inside the Lump, weren't you?"

"...Not really. It isn't like that." Paul reached for the coffee cup and took another mouthful. "You taught me what's happening. I have a non-local perception.

Like a quantum wave function I'm not limited to the here and now; I perceive events spacelike-separated from —"

"Paul," Green said urgently, "skip it. Tell me what you saw. I have to know. My career is hinging on this moment — Is it the Xeelee?"

"I... Yes. It's the Xeelee." He groped for analogies. "It's like a huge hangar in there. There are Xeelee, waiting, whole populations of them. Thousands of ships, ready to be — ripened. Artifacts of all kinds."

Green smiled. "Weapons?"

"Yes." Over Green's shoulder Paul could see Taft approach quietly.

"What in hell are they doing?"

"I don't know. But, Commander, I don't think they mean us any harm. You see, there's another presence which —"

Taft's bearded face was twisted with a kind of pain. He raised two clasped fists over Green's head.

"Commander!" Paul jerked convulsively.

Green half-rose, turned his head. Two fists hit his skull with a sound like wood on wood. The reaction carried Taft perhaps a foot into the air. He cried out. His hands came away bloody.

Green tumbled into Paul's lap; then he slid to the floor of the car.

Paul stared at the blood on Taft's hands. Memories stirred impossibly. So it is coming to pass, as I knew/remembered. But how...?

"Paul, I —" Taft spread his hands, palms upwards. "I'm sorry. I have to do this." With clumsy hands he fitted Green's helmet into place and sealed the neck; then he began hauling the huge, limp body towards the airlock. "My team back in the City are being evacuated. Forcibly, by Green's damnable Navy goons."

"Why? What's happened?"

"You've stirred up the Xeelee with your quantum jaunt," Taft said acidly. "The glow of the surface is brighter. And it's getting hotter. In some places the meteorite debris is already red hot. So we're being evacuated — at the point of a gun." Taft sealed up his own helmet. "So I've got to stop this, you see, Paul. I'm sorry. It's for the good of the species. The Xeelee have to understand we're not continually going to attack them. The colony has to be built."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get Green back to the Face car. Then I'll return here and —"

Paul felt his breath grow shallow. "And what?"

Without replying Taft turned away and stepped through the airlock; the membrane closed behind Green's booted feet.

Paul sat for long minutes. The humming of the car's instruments was the only sound. Through the windows Taft and Green were silhouetted against a glowing Face, the pair of them looking like a single, struggling insect.

Paul imagined Taft's return, those bloodied, space-suited hands reaching for him —

There was a joystick at the front of the car.

He pushed himself out of his chair and stood swaying. He took cautious steps along the narrow aisle, looking neither to left or right.

Nervously he pushed at the joystick. The car lurched a few yards; Paul stumbled back, grabbing the

arm of the nearest chair. He felt a grin spread over his face. Had Taft expected him to sit patiently and wait to die? He pushed the stick once more. Motors whirled and the car slid along the Edge.

Taft dumped Green's inert form and came floundering back up the slope, a toy figure gesturing in tiny frustration.

Paul settled into a seat and let the satisfaction of the small victory settle over him. There would be plenty of time to face the future later... when the car reached Corner Mountain, with nowhere else to go.

The car patiently climbed the Edge's increasing slope. The brightness of the Faces continued to increase; at last the car's lower windows opaqued automatically.

Paul could see Taft following, a silver-suited doll riding an open maintenance buggy up the dizzying slopes of the Edge. For the first few hours Paul let Taft speak to him. When the half-rational arguments turned to sobbed pleas for understanding Paul snapped the radio off.

The Corner Mountain became visible as a sharp angle against the stars. The car slowed to a halt, tipped up at about thirty-five degrees.

Paul closed his helmet and stepped through the airlock. His footsteps were light, airy; Green had told him how, this far from the mass centre of the Lump, gravity would be down to a third that at the City. The brilliance of the surface hit him with a soft impact. Heat soaked through the soles of his boots. With an odd sense of calm he worked his way up the slope to the summit, his feet on the tilted surfaces to either side of the Edge.

At last he stood unsteadily at the summit itself, feet wrapped around the sharp-edged point, arms extended for balance. The vertical lurched around him as his inner ear sought the way to the centre of mass of the Sugar Lump.

Taft had abandoned his vehicle and was scrambling up the dazzling ridge. Paul felt a huge peace, as if he were once more in the metaphorical palm of the antiXeelee. He turned slowly, feet working around the summit. Three square Faces as wide as Earth shared corners at the point where he stood; he saw Edges disappear into infinity, watched Faces collapse into glowing lines of abstraction.

Sugar Lump. Edge. Corner Mountain. He found himself laughing. Harmless words used to shield men from the astonishing truth of a world shaped like a cube, of a made thing whirling and sparkling in space.

Taft stood before him. The light showed him to be a machine of pulleys, cables and gears; quantum functions sparkled unnoticed around his eyes and fingers.

Paul smiled. And jumped backwards.

Taft stumbled forward, reaching. Then he was gone, eclipsed by an Edge.

Paul let his limbs dangle. Spline warships paddled across his view like agitated fish.

He was approaching a glowing Face. What next? Would he strike, bounce away, proceed skipping and sliding? Would the impacts crush his bones? Would the heat of the surface reach through the suit and boil his flesh?

The certainty of his death was unreal, intangible, unthreatening.

Now, why should that be? Was his death to be as great a mystery as his origin? Would he die ignorant of the answers of both the great questions of his existence – where did I come from? and where am I going to?

Or perhaps the two answers were somehow linked...

He found he hoped Taft and Green would survive.

The Face rushed at him. Wave functions rippled like grass in a breeze.

Folded ships hung around him like moths.

There was a sense of motion, a thrumming of huge engines somewhere; as if the Sugar Lump and its contents were a great liner, forging through some immense sea.

The antiXeelee cradled him. It studied him dispassionately, huge and cold. Paul felt knowledge wash over him, and slowly understanding grew.

The cube planet had been created at that moment – far in the future of mankind – when the Xeelee reached their full glory. And were ready to depart.

(Depart? Where to? Why? The answers were – awesome; beyond his comprehension.)

On its completion the cube – with its guardian, the antiXeelee, and with a million others – had been sent on an impossible voyage, forging back through the unfolding ages to the birth time of the Xeelee themselves. The Xeelee would erupt fully developed from the cubes, shaking out the wings of their beautiful spacecraft and ready for their huge projects.

Paul sought human words to capture the vast concepts sailing around him. Vacuum diagrams! The cube worlds were antiparticles, moving back through time to initiate their own creation. The whole of Xeelee history was a single, vast vacuum diagram, closed and complete of itself.

But...what of me?

Now Paul sensed a monstrous amusement. He was cupped within gigantic palms for an immeasurable period; the time engines surged steadily into the past –

And then he was lifted up and released like a captive bird.

He looked down. He was outside the Sugar Lump, falling towards it. Spline ships converged. There was the City, still alive with the hopes of Taft and the rest, spreading over the meteorite debris. On the rim of the debris was a fallen figure, a young man in a soiled spacesuit lying face down on the glowing surface.

Understanding came at last.

I have no beginning. I have no end. I am a vacuum diagram too, closed on myself. He remembered the absurd refrain: "We're here because we're here because we're here..."

He tumbled into the head of the fallen man. Skull darkness hit him like a physical shock, and he felt the pieces of his understanding shatter like a dropped vessel, his memories seep away.

In the end he was left only with a vast amusement. Then even that fell away.

Paul opened his eyes.

His body ached. He lay face-down on a surface that glowed with white light. Grass, or fine hair, washed over the surface.

What is this place? How the hell did I get here? And...

What's my name?

His face grew slick with sweat; his breath sawed through his mouth. He perceived the shape of answers, like figures seen through a fog. He writhed against the shining ground.

The answers floated away.

A meaningless jingle ran around his mind: "We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here..."

The grass vanished. He waited, hollow.



Steve Baxter, an *Interzone* discovery of some years ago, recently sold his first novel (an expansion of "Raft," *IZ* 31) as well as his first short-story collection to Grafton Books. At the suggestion of his editor there, he has decided to drop the initials, "S. M.," from his byline and will henceforth be known officially as Stephen Baxter. His amusing fantasy story, "The Song," appeared recently in the G. W. Books "Warhammer" anthology *Red Thirst*.

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Culture Shock

Barrington J. Bayley

Quiet as a shadow, the man slipped from the cover of the forest, pausing to look carefully all around him. Ahead rose a stony bank which, so the elders of his band said, had been created the last time the world shook. Even today no big trees grew on it. There were only shrubs, saplings and grass, and, exposed here and there, pieces of the special stone that attracted him to this place.

Satisfied that there was no danger, he moved diagonally up the slope, his fire-sharpened stick leaning casually on his shoulder. Expertly he moved his gaze from nodule to nodule, and as he did so there once again happened within him something that was like the kindling of a flame.

It was about two seasons ago that he had made an astounding discovery: his power of perception was greater than the things he perceived. By making a certain effort of attention, he could cause whatever he looked at almost to glow, to become vivid, to become subject to a magical force in his consciousness. Only he could exert it. Animals, he was sure, never looked at the world this way. Their vision was purely passive. No others of his band, either, showed any sign of knowing the secret.

Take this stone, now. He prized the flint nodule from the ground and carried it to where he liked to work, beside a flat-topped boulder. The hammer-stone he had used last time lay there undisturbed. Settling himself cross-legged, he scraped dry earth from the nodule and studied it. In his mind he saw a flake fall off here, a flake there. Further, he saw the sharp blades being used to slice and saw. The nodule slowly changed shape, the mysteries of its inner colours revealed blow by blow.

At length he held it steady on the boulder, picked up the hammer-stone, concentrated his attention on one spot, and dealt a hard tap.

As he had intended, a large piece fell off the end. Opened, the stone revealed its gorgeous clean rings of blues and purples, rimmed by a white skin. His mind began to race. He saw the nodule as it would look once he had stripped off that skin, the sharp blades he would strike from it, and finally the pear-shaped core that was useful for digging.

He balanced the unbroken end on the boulder. Intently, with controlled movements, he began to strike.

The field generator that drove the transfer cage – to give the illegal time machine its proper technical name – had a habit of emitting brief humming sounds which broke the cabin's dead silence.

Even though he knew it only meant the equipment was holding the cage steady against random drift, the irregularity of the noises unnerved Gustav.

He peered over the shoulder of Quelle the pilot, who for some time had been trying to set the generator to take them further back than their present location of roughly three million years. Quelle shook his head. "That's about it, I think. If Harscheller wants to go back any further he'll need a bigger unit."

"He'll be annoyed," Gustav said. "He was looking forward to seeing dinosaurs."

"Then he'll have to get a metamax drive proper. This is only a part of one."

"Okay. Lock on to that hominid scene we spotted earlier. Personally I find it more interesting than dinosaurs. I'll try to persuade our employer to see it that way too."

Quelle nodded. He steered the cage diagonally across the spacetime continuum, then locked on as ordered.

The viewframes were arranged so that they seemed to be windows looking directly through the cage walls. Quelle switched them on. Visible was a stony bank where there squatted a small, hairy hominid. The specimen was working a piece of flint, using a hammer-stone to fracture off flakes, though unless one watched for a while he appeared to be doing nothing. Up to a minute would pass before he struck another careful, deliberate blow.

The hominid couldn't see the transfer cage, of course. Equipment to make materialization possible was government-bonded. Even Peter Harscheller would find that difficult to obtain.

Yes, difficult, but not impossible, Gustav thought sourly. There wasn't much that the spoiled favourite son of Hank Harscheller, head of Harscheller Conglomerates, couldn't get if he set his mind to it. Not that Gustav cared one way or the other. He was only an employee, one trusted enough to crew an illegal time safari, just like the technicians who had rigged the transfer cage.

Suddenly a door opened. Peter Harscheller strolled from his private cabin. Behind him came his companion for the trip, a girl in a silver sheen dress, with green-tinted hair and heavily made-up eyes. Harscheller referred to her as Cynthia, though he had never bothered to introduce her.

He spoke in a languid voice. "Nearly there, are we?"

Apologetically Gustav turned to him. "Three million years or thereabouts is the best we can manage, I'm afraid, sir."

Harscheller pouted. "But I promised Cynthia a tyrannosaurus!"

"That requires a complete drive unit, it seems."

"It does? All right, then, I'll get one. And a materializer, too." He squeezed Cynthia's hand and gave her an ostentatious peck on the cheek. "Don't worry, my love. I'll get you a tyrannosaur next time. I'm going to shoot one!"

Quelle glanced round, startled. *How the hell does he expect to get away with that?* Gustav thought. "Bagging" a prehistoric reptile would have serious repercussions for them all if it really happened. Compared with that, the bit of fun Harscheller had planned for the current jaunt was decidedly second-best. Bolted to one wall of the cage was a mental projector – actually it was a teaching machine. Harscheller's idea was to stampede a herd of diplodoci, maybe, or set two T. Rexes at one another's throats, using the projector's ability to flash images directly into a living mind.

For the first time he seemed to notice what was on the viewframes. He frowned. "What's this?"

Gustav changed his posture, almost jumping to attention as it were. "I thought you might be interested to see this, sir," he said bravely. "It's a very early example of skilled toolmaking. It may even be the earliest example of the technique of flaking flint to produce blades. Quite remarkable to find it this far back."

"That's supposed to be good, is it?"

"At this period all you can generally expect to see is hominids cracking stones – any stones – to produce very rough edges. By contrast with that, note how methodical the hominid is. He uses the flat boulder as an anvil and a second piece of stone as a hammer. Once he's gained some practice he'll be able to strike fifty blades an hour from a flintstone like that. The technique has been reinvented countless times in human history."

"Wow," Cynthia said in a surprisingly loud and acid voice. "That's real technology."

Harscheller peered in puzzlement. "You call him a hominid? He looks more like an ape."

"To us as laymen he does look like that," Gustav admitted. He regarded the man's four-foot stature and simian-seeming features. "But he's smarter than any ape has ever been. He's one of the eighteen hominid species that have been catalogued since the advent of time transfer."

"Is he our ancestor?"

"No, this species died out. Rather surprisingly when you look at this specimen's accomplishment." Gustav hesitated. "According to the catalogue his mental capacity is about eighty per cent of ours."

"In other words he's a moron." Harscheller made a wry mouth. "Is this the best you can do? A cretin banging rocks together? All right, let's go home."

Gustav bristled inwardly. It angered him to see the man belittled. He tried to remember his natural employee caution, but still the words came out.

"He's not a moron, sir," he said quietly. "He's a genius."

Staring his employer's son in the face, he continued: "Granted, you and I were born with more native intelligence, but the point is, do we use it? No, we don't. Scarcely anyone does. What have I ever done, and what have you ever done, that's in any way

creative? This man is pushing his mental ability to its limits, and that's what makes him different from me and different from you. You want a definition of genius? That's it."

Peter Harscheller stared back. He smiled negligently. "An unfavourable comparison between a semi-animal and myself may not be in your best interest, Gustav. If you've no respect for breeding at least think of your career – What was that?"

A ping had come from the pilot's board. It repeated several times. Quelle swivelled his seat.

"Government tracer, sir. We'd best not move just now or they'll pick us up."

"Yes, very well. What a drag." Harscheller sighed. Then he eyed Cynthia and brightened a little. "Come on, love, let's have a drink."

They disappeared into their cabin, which in point of fact was bedecked as a boudoir. Quelle looked sadly at Gustav, shaking his head.

"You ought to watch it. Remember, he'll be God when the old man dies."

"I'm tired," Gustav said. "Will you be okay on your own? I'm going to lie down."

"I'll hold her on station and let you know when the trace has gone."

Gustav retired, defeated, to the crew rest cubicle. He lay down in the darkness. Through the partition he could hear muted squeals as Cynthia expressed her obligatory appreciation of the rich and powerful man who held her in his arms.

Genius. What made the human brain evolve? There was a mystery attached to its existence – the mystery of its non-use. Or rather of its under-use. Rarely did any individual employ to the full the mental power nature had given him. Too much effort was involved. The average person, in fact, scarcely used his thinking capacity at all.

And yet the modern brain could only have evolved by being used.

So among the minute populations comprising the earliest men, the incidence of genius must have been very high indeed. It must have been commonplace.

Then why was genius so rare now? Perhaps population level was irrelevant. Perhaps it was only necessary for there to be a sufficient number of fully functioning minds and mankind would keep advancing however populous. The rest were like drones, benefiting from the work of a few...

After all, something like the metamax drive only needed inventing once.

An incident drifted from Gustav's memory. That the metamaximum drive, to give it its proper name, could be used to transfer into the past (though not into the future) was a fairly recent discovery. It had originally been conceived as a relativistic space drive. Some years ago Gustav had been on a metamax ship: a company survey ship. Halfway between the Milky Way and the Andromeda Galaxy, the metamax unit had broken down.

If that were to happen to the transfer cage it wouldn't matter too much, except for the risk of being detected by government tracers. The cage would spontaneously drift back to the 24th century where it belonged. Transspatial mode was an altogether

different matter. Stuck between galaxies, unable to signal their location, there was no possibility of rescue.

To understand the metamax drive well enough to be able to repair one required an IQ of at least 200. Being an early model, the company ship was lucky enough to have two such qualified technicians aboard. For three days they had wrestled with the problem. Gustav remembered how much their degree of concentration had impressed him, though he had strongly suspected that this was the first time their 200 quotient had really been put to full stretch.

Waiting, trying hard not to think about the consequences of their failure, he had watched an account of the ancient Egyptians crossing the Atlantic Ocean in reed ships. A journey to America must have seemed, to them, on the same scale as the first crossing between galaxies to 24th-century humanity.

In the 20th century anthropologists had built a replica reed ship and attempted to copy the Egyptian feat, but as often happened they had underestimated ancient know-how. They left out what they assumed to be a useless detail in the old drawings: a rope joining mast to stern. That rope had been there to provide necessary tension. Halfway across the ocean the stern sagged, became water-logged, and the ship had to be abandoned. A second replica, correctly built, made the journey without mishap.

What standard of intelligence, Gustav asked himself, had been involved in designing the original Egyptian ship? A society's technical level was a question of historical development; it said little about its people. Whether the material at hand was stone, reeds or semiconductors, the same degree of mental effort might well have been applied to it.

There was another point to be made. He recalled that the metamax techs had got along badly. At one point a bitter quarrel had arisen when they thought they weren't going to be able to fix the drive; after the ship docked they had refused to speak to one another. Gustav had been struck, even then, by the incongruity between the intellectual and the emotional lives of the two men. On the Egyptians' long voyages across the ocean there had no doubt been similar quarrels between otherwise intelligent parties. The emotional part of human nature had not evolved since the time of the hominid on the viewframes.

The squealing from next door was joined by rhythmic creaking sounds. Ignoring them, Gustav drifted off to sleep.

When Peter Harscheller next emerged from his cabin Quelle saw, out of the corner of his eye, Cynthia pulling up her tights before following him through the door.

"Well?" Harscheller demanded.

"The tracer is fading, sir. We'll be able to move soon."

"Where's Gustav?"

"Sleeping, sir. Shall I wake him?"

"No, he's useless anyway. Just get us back home as soon as you can."

"Yes sir."

"And turn that garbage off." Harscheller waved to the viewframes, which Quelle had left active and which still showed the hominid peering over his flint nodule.

"Yes sir."

"No, wait!" Cynthia ordered. Quelle stayed his hand in the act of reaching for the switch, unsure whether it was safe to ignore her. "Let's have some fun with him!" Cynthia said. He peered round and saw a malicious smile on her features. "Him and his silly bit of stone! Let's show him what *real* technology is like! We've got the teaching aid!"

Quelle blinked, looking from her to the mental projector. He remembered she had mentioned being a school teacher. If so she would be familiar with the projector's use. Also, since it was an educational machine, it still had a box full of teaching discs attached to its casing.

Amiably, he said: 'It's against the law to do that to a past-time human, ma'am.'

"It's against the law our being here in the first place," Harscheller reminded him loftily. "Let me be the one to worry about that aspect of things, pilot. Anyway, I'd hardly call him *human*." He wrinkled his nose, as though he could smell the creature.

"The effects of future-to-past causation haven't been worked out properly yet, sir," Quelle persisted mildly. "That's why unauthorized transfer is prohibited. Perhaps we should ask Gustav's advice?"

Harscheller was no longer listening. He was with Cynthia at the projector, watching her riffle through the discs. Quelle slipped from the pilot's desk and opened the door to the rest cubicle. "Gustav!" he said urgently. "Would you come through, please?"

Gustav came awake at once. He raised himself from the couch and emerged blearily. Cynthia had selected a disc and was holding it up to the light. "Perfect!" she breathed. "What Technology Can Do. Wait till this little lot hits him!"

"What are you doing?" Gustav croaked.

"Putting the natives in their place, darling," she told him airily, and slipped the disc in the slot.

"They intend to irradiate the hominid," Quelle put in. "With modern information."

Gustav stared. A vision came to him of 24th-century science at the service of mankind three million years ago. Stimulating the tiny brains of dinosaurs was one thing – that could hardly change world history. But what would this do? He thought of the civilization he had known being swept away and replaced by one millions of years more advanced, with a different human species – a world where *homo sapiens sapiens* hadn't even evolved.

He felt he should rush over and push Cynthia away from the projector. He knew that that was what he ought to do. But he stood there, his will paralyzed by the presence of Harscheller, as she lined up the empath barrel and pressed the button.

The man was resting from his labours and gazed into the distance, his face calm, almost sleepy. For a few moments he briefly examined anew the results of his work, but for the most part seemed content just to squat there.

In the transfer cage all four watched avidly to see how he would react to the impact of the mind beam. To their surprise he apparently didn't notice it. The expression on his face was unchanged. He continued to finger the pared nodule as if wondering what to do with it next.

With relief Gustav concluded that the projector didn't work if aimed from within an unmaterialized transfer cage. Either that, or it was of a design that failed to register in the mind of this particular human species.

Cynthia's disappointment showed. "Well, there you have it," she said peevishly. "He's too stupid to be teachable. Why, even eight-year-olds benefit from devices like this."

Harscheller comforted her, his mouth wry. "Quite so, dear. Shut the windows, pilot."

Quelle switched off the viewframes, leaving the cage's main room seeming closed in by the blank grey screens. A mildly claustrophobic feeling attacked Gustav.

"How much longer —" began Harscheller, then broke off. The same repeating ping as before was coming from the pilot's board, but getting louder and accelerating.

Quelle froze, his expression one of disbelief as he stared at the instruments. "They've found us."

"What are you talking about, man!" Harscheller shouted. "We're not even moving!"

"They've seen our trace, sir. They're coming straight at us."

Harscheller calmed himself. "All right. So cast off. Lose them."

"It's hopeless," said Quelle. But he obeyed. There was a swaying sensation as the cage abandoned its position and began traversing the time continuum.

The detector pips slowed and faded, but not altogether.

The turn of events perplexed Gustav. The cage only became vulnerable to a tracer when moving through time. Its profile when stationary was so small as to make the probability of a probe finding it negligible.

"The projector!" he said suddenly. "That must have given us away!"

Harscheller stepped closer to Quelle, leaning towards him. "Could an empath beam leave a trace?"

"I've never heard of it before. I suppose it's possible."

"Lose them, pilot. Put some distance between us, then stop the cage. Maybe they'll lose sight of us."

"Right." The pings had levelled off now. They all felt a perceptible jolt, like a skipped heartbeat, as Quelle brought the cage to a sudden halt.

They were silent, listening. Cynthia squealed in fright as the trace detector again strengthened and accelerated, more so than before, becoming almost continuous. Quelle slumped. He switched the detector off.

"We're done for," he said dully.

He had scarcely finished speaking when a blue glow appeared round the frame of the external door. It opened. The room began to seem crowded as, one after the other, three men in light blue uniforms stepped through, military-looking in moulded helmets and unzipped weapons holsters.

Of the three, one wore sleeve chevrons. He spoke.

"Please be notified that you are detained by the Time Survey Service. You are believed to be making an unauthorized flight. Also to have used prohibited equipment in a past epoch."

So it was the projector, Gustav thought. Harscheller drew himself erect and looked the TSS man straight

in the eye, speaking calmly and firmly. "Our flight is authorized. I am Peter Harscheller of Harscheller Conglomerates. This is a company craft, and these are all company employees. I shall expect an apology when we dock. Either that, or my lawyers will demand to inspect the registration procedure."

The policeman nodded. He looked at Gustav — perhaps, Gustav told himself, spotting the most truthful member of the party.

"Is there anyone else aboard?"

Gustav shook his head.

"Will you all please remain in this room while we tow you back to headquarters."

He turned to go.

We're caught, Gustav thought dismally. We'll go to prison. With that thought, a decision crystallized in his mind. His fear of Peter Harscheller, his vestigial loyalty to his employer, his paralysis of will, all vanished at once.

He coughed nervously, and then the words came rushing out. "I want to make a report. We were using the teaching machine on an early hominid. We gave him a science lesson. He may now be in possession of 24th-century knowledge, a case of future-to-past causation —"

He stopped, struck by an unpleasant thought. What if the Survey Service deemed it necessary to kill the ancient toolmaker so as to nip historical change in the bud?

"Of course, the beam probably didn't reach him," he finished weakly.

Harscheller was staring incredulously at him. The policeman also looked round, but his expression remained impassive.

"Full statements will be taken at headquarters."

He walked through the door, which closed behind him. His underlings took up position on either side of it, from where they could overlook the room. They seemed more relaxed once their superior was out of the way. Gustav thought one of them glanced at him sympathetically, and he felt the need for an ally.

"I was right, wasn't I?" he asked. "What we did could change world history?"

The swaying sensation returned as they came under tow. The policeman hesitated. "Probably not. If research so far means anything, the interference there's been with past epochs has already been incorporated into the world we know. That is, where it's had any result at all. Of course, that might be because the Service will achieve one hundred per cent prevention shortly."

Quelle spoke. "Does that mean we'll get off lightly?"

The other TSS man answered, less friendly than the first. "It ought to be obvious to everybody that time travel has got to be rigidly controlled, even stopped altogether, or God knows what might happen. You've committed a serious crime and you'll have to pay for it."

"It isn't fair!" Cynthia whined. "The ape-man didn't learn anything anyway!"

She began to cry. Harscheller put his arm round her waist. "Don't worry, my love. Nothing's going to happen to you. Or me either." He planted a kiss on her cheek.

Bitterly Gustav said: "So you think you're above the law, do you?"

Immediately Harscheller's eyes were on him again, eyebrows raised, making him feel uncomfortable. "Gustav, do you truly not realize what it is to be immensely wealthy? Delay, delay is the last resort in law. If the worst comes to the worst my lawyers can drag a case out beyond my lifetime. People like me don't go to prison."

He seemed utterly careless that TSS men were present. He even smiled indulgently at them. Their only response was to stare woodenly straight ahead. He nodded to Quelle. "You, too, my good faithful servant. You too will be protected."

But the smile vanished as he rounded once more on Gustav. "You, though, you can get your own lawyer. If you can afford one. You're finished with Harscheller Conglomerates. You'll never work for any worthwhile company again."

"Cynthia, of course," he added casually, "is a poor ignorant girl, innocent of anything that's happened."

Gustav groped behind him until he found a seat. He slumped on it and stared at the floor. It occurred to him that if he had staged his rebellion a few minutes earlier, and prevented Cynthia from using the projector, none of them would be in this pickle.

The man laid down the hammer-stone. He had concentrated for quite some time, and now he wanted to rest and reflect.

The day had moved on. The sun was low and had reddened as it sank towards the horizon. In the past it had come to him, dimly, that the sun always moved in the sky – except when it was under the ground, of course – when for all he knew there was nothing to stop it from staying in one place forever. He contemplated the glowing orb. He brought to it that same force of consciousness which he had used on flint-stone. It became a thing of awe, a mysteriously blazing component of the world. But he was unable to unlock the riddle of why it behaved as it did and in no other way.

After a while he picked up one of the blades he had struck. He ran his thumb gently along its edge. Yes, it always worked. The blades were sharp. He would take them back to his band. They would slice portions of meat, pare wooden staves, scrape skins. People would marvel at the sharpness and neatness of his tools.

These blades were different from fire, the band's other magical possession. Fire was snatched haphazardly from the world, flashing from the sky. It had to be kept alive once caught. The man remembered the time when the band's fire had gone out, and he and others had gone begging to a neighbour band to rekindle it. The hard blue stone was nothing like that. It was fashioned, from beginning to end, by his will and intent.

Examining the blade, he conceived a new image. If it could be fastened to the end of a shaft... He saw it plunge into the body of a deer. It would make a better weapon than a fire-hardened point, if it did not break.

And the core. Dropping the blade, he picked up the diminished nodule to look at it afresh. Could it be shaped better, so as to have an edge like the blade only bigger? Big enough to cut through things as large as trees, perhaps...

His thoughts wandered. Again he raised his eyes,

looking over the green top of the forest to where the sun slowly settled.

What was the world? Why did he exist?

Suddenly the answer to the second question, asked so often before, became evident to him. He existed to take hold of the world and shape new things from it. That was the meaning of his life: his work with the blue stone.

Then it was that the pictures flashed into his brain. They came without warning. Afterwards, he knew he could never describe to anyone what he had seen. There were no words for such things. There were scarcely even thoughts.

He saw great caves raised up into the air like termite heaps, but in those heaps lived men. The men were strange, taller and straighter than he, and they were wrapped in what to him looked like the down of young birds. They strode with purpose. Their looks were haughty. He saw them work together in teams as when the band went hunting, but what they worked at was impossible to understand, except that when they were finished there were huge objects that rushed across a land without forests, objects that surged across endless expanses of water, that hurtled through the sky, and inside those objects were those same men. A man spoke alone in a cave, with no one there to hear him, but far, far away, further than anyone could walk, his voice was heard by whoever he wished. Men walked among the moon and sun and stars. They gathered together and watched events that did not happen in the whole wide world. And it was all done with stone. Stone that was shaped hugely and delicately, that was carved in blocks bigger than a hillock or in threads finer than cobweb, stone that glowed and sparkled and flowed like water and then became solid again in any shape the men desired. And then there was more, which the man was simply unable to comprehend, so that it was a mystifying blur.

It was not a dream. Something in the pictures told him that it was not a dream. Somewhere in the world it was all true. Everything that he saw, those men could do. The vision ceased as inexplicably as it had come, and after a while his gaze dropped. He became aware of crude flakes and chips scattered around him, and his heart sank. He saw that his hands were turning something round and round. It was a roughly battered piece of stone, scarcely recognizable as the work of a man, but of which, only moments before, he had been so foolishly proud.

Barrington J. Bayley, who lives in Shropshire and has been writing sf for many years, is one of this magazine's most popular contributors (see the readers' poll results in our editorial column). His most recent books are the omnibuses entitled *The Fall of Chronopolis* and *Collision with Chronos* and *The Pillars of Eternity* and *The Garments of Caean*, both issued by Pan Books. We also have an interview with him in this issue.

Barrington J. Bayley

Interview by Andy Robertson & David Pringle

You are a science-fiction writer with a notable interest in gadgetry as well as matters philosophical. So why don't you use a word processor? Distrustful of computers?

They cost too much.

I expect I'll get one sooner or later. Everybody tells me how good they are, and eventually some hands-on time will probably convince me. Though to my list of defensive excuses – don't want to stare at a green screen all day, don't trust magnetic storage etc – is added my horror on being told that the model I would probably buy has resident Logo. I'll explain in a moment.

Obviously wp's save a lot of time if you know more or less what you're doing. Trouble is, I often don't know what I'm doing and apply brute force to get something readable, writing version after version, revising and revising, finally patching it together from a good bit here and a good bit there, or simply going back to the original which turns out to be the best one. I like to have all those messed-up sheets, to be able to see what I had before I changed it. Would I have bothered to save/print all that chaos?

You can imagine some nifty features for a wp, e.g. a check for word repetitions would be more useful than the standard spellcheck (most writers can spell already). Or am I suggesting something Dave Langford has already done?

Distrustful of computers? No, just terrified. In the early eighties I got the bug like a lot of people, and after absorbing all my energies in Basic for quite a long time (you know how it goes: "I'll just try out this idea, it will only take five minutes..." and you're still working on it twelve hours later), I started to learn Z80 assembly. I grasped about the main registers and so forth and was about to continue when a voice seemed to speak inside my head saying, "Bayley, what do you think you're doing? Is there some aim to all this? Sure, it will be great to be able to write some machine-code sub-routines for your programs. After that there's Forth to get to grips with, and Pascal with its natty use of variable, and of course we must delve into a list language, probably Logo with its terrific

graphics. But the real reason you've got hooked by this thing is that it's full of fascinating problems that are also solvable with a little effort, unlike many of the problems you face in life. Let's face it, you've got yourself a hobby, and you're not a hobby-type person really, are you?"

I put the book down and I swear I haven't opened it since, and I've hardly gone near a computer since, either.

I had cured myself of micromania. **Your fiction has long been noted for its original and fantastic ideas. What aspects of your background lead you to such ideas? Did you, for example, have any scientific training?**

Not unless you count GCE O level in General Science. I recall showing an interest in science from an early age, but when it came to formal education I proved to be a dunce. I was too busy daydreaming about spaceships.

Science fiction itself is the formative background you are looking for. Ideas are, after all, its lifeblood. It puzzles me a little to have this reputation in a field which teems with ideas coming from all quarters. Recently someone spoke to me about "your dotty brand of science fiction." Perhaps that's what people mean.

I can only point out that "ideas" never pop out of nowhere, but are always generated out of other "ideas." Inventiveness is really a matter of spending time "pondering."

I do tend to think in the abstract and this can be a disadvantage. There are two kinds of "idea" that an sf writer can get. One is "story idea," and that's fine, you can make a start, you can get going with it. The other is abstract idea, a notion, a thought, without any story context. Finding one can, for me, be very difficult, which possibly confesses my deficiencies as a writer. So it lies around for years until it's too late because someone else has used it.

"Ideas" are ten a penny. It's doing something with them that counts. I saw the head of the Sony Corporation being interviewed on tv. The (British) interviewer came out with the usual "But you Japs are no good at getting ideas, are you?" sort of thing, and the reply was to the effect, "Ideas aren't what

count. Anyone can have an idea. Bringing them to fruition is what counts, and we are very good at that."

Your novels, *The Grand Wheel* (1977), *Star Winds* (1978), *The Pillars of Eternity* (1982), and so on, often feature "ancient sciences" – alchemy, mystic religions, the Tarot, classical philosophy, etc. – as opposed to modern science. Why should this be?

Well, it seemed like a good idea, er... I never thought to be asked why. One reason is, these bodies of thought are evocative in that respect. After all, mediaevalism in sf is practically a tradition.

It was a phase, I expect. I'd delved into some of this stuff and found it fun to write around. Also I'd taken the trouble to derive a system of ideas from the Tarot (like millions before me) and I used bits of that. The write-up is one of my many unfinished projects.

How seriously do you take these "ancient sciences"? Not in the sense of literal belief, perhaps, but do you think they might contain valuable insights? Or is your interest purely artistic?

Of course there are insights. What the modern age has is method and professionalism; it doesn't have a monopoly in quality of thought. Let's start with the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, who it can be argued started the process leading to science in the modern sense. It's common to give credit to the atomists for correctly deducing the particulate nature of matter (and that was not a lucky guess but a triumph of dialectical thought, reconciling the arguments of Heracleitus and Parmenides). But what interest me more are the Pythagoreans, whose attempts to understand nature are apt to be regarded as eccentric and mystical, as in their doctrine of the octave. Yet that doctrine introduced into western thought the idea that matter follows the principles of proportionality and periodicity. Proportionality is a typically Greek thing, of course, but periodicity is a less obvious concept to find, except in relation to time, two and a half thousand years ago. And, accidentally or not, it is surprisingly correct as we know from the periodic table. Mind you, not a lot is known about what the Pythagoreans actually

did teach. I suspect that their doctrine that "all is number" is interpreted in too Platonic a way. It's quite a thought that all the variety of structure and substance in the material world, which we see in a qualitative way, depends on fairly simple numerical relationships within the atom. That may be the Pythagorean conception. So like atomic theory, these ideas have been lurking all this time, waiting for the exact sciences to confirm them.

Mostly the "occult sciences" – alchemy, Cabbala etc. – use Pythagorean notions in their theoretical foundation but are fanciful constructions, interesting for their colour and their speculative imagination. It makes you realize what the science fiction writers were doing before there was any science fiction – they were writing the Gnostic myths and *The Book of the Concealed Mystery*, lovely stuff about failed attempts to make universes before this one, and so forth.

Are you particularly fond of any of your characters? (We're thinking of Jasperodus in *The Soul of the Robot* [1974], who, so far as we know, is the only character you've devoted a sequel to.)

Yes, that's right, I felt interested in Jasperodus. In that case the novel evolved out of the character, rare for me – mostly, in the good old sf manner, my characters are concocted to set off the scenery. That's not the reason for the sequel, though. I was persuaded into that by someone who thought he was worth making into a series.

Long after I had written it I realized that *The Soul of the Robot* repeats the story of the Little Gingerbread Man, who comes out of the oven, runs out of the door looking for adventure, and in four gulps ceases to exist. Children are appalled when they hear that story for the first time. It's far more shocking than the murder of the heroine in *Psycho*.

At the time I was writing him I also liked Rodrone, the main character of *Star Virus*, but I don't know what I would think now.

Will there be any more novels about Jasperodus, after *The Rod of Light* (1985)?

There might be. I contracted for two sequels – with Allison & Busby – but the contract went down the tube. If I come up with a good theme for a third book I'll do it. Is there anybody apart from me who hasn't done trilogies? But my instinct on finishing a book is to forget it and think about something different.

Sorry to ask such a leading question – but do you think that modern sf suffers from tunnel vision and a lack of imagination?

My reading of current output is so limited that you could probably answer that better – my own short answer would be no. The same rule appertains

as it always has everywhere – 90% of everything is rubbish (or is it 99%) – but present writers have produced, for instance, John Varley's *Ophiuchi Hotline* and Brian Stableford's *Walking Shadow*, both as good as anything that's been done in the genre and Stapledonesque in scope. Then there's Ian Watson's stunning *Gardens of Delight* (admittedly all this goes back a few years), Bruce Sterling who gets better and better, and I could go on and on. If I look at the field today I'm reminded of the old Cockney saying, "There ain't half been some clever bastards."

I'm not sure exactly what you mean by tunnel vision. With tunnel vision you see only what's ahead and not what's beside you, right? Maybe we should have more of it. Some areas of science fiction have been overtaken by progress, particularly by the explosive proliferation of computers, and some stuff being done now has a contemporary, even topical feel. And it might get more like that. Furthermore, mainstream literature is going to have to come to terms with the increasing intrusion of hi-tech into ordinary life. Just imagine when the human genome is mapped and seeming miracles suddenly become possible – replacement organs grown to order, disease eradicated, the human organism enhanced, maybe immortality... Or when machine consciousness makes its appearance. Maybe the river of sf will disappear into the swamp of general fiction. What then will be the role for imaginative vision? If the genre continues maybe it will have to concentrate on alternative realities, metaphysical speculation, or something of that sort.

So maybe the implication that sf has lost imaginative drive should be held over for a few decades, when everything has been said or done, and there are no new ideas under the sun or beyond it. Sadly a review of past cultures, with their cycles of fresh thought and *fin de siècle* decline, tells us that this will probably happen. Or perhaps psychological conditioning, clever drugs, brain-assist implants, or whatever, will rocket us into an eternity of ever-fresh thinking. Where will it end? (Maybe future sf will all be written by super-intelligent machine consciousnesses.)

Many of your recent short stories, say from "Escapist Literature" (*Interzone* 13) onwards, seems to be more concerned with strong emotional states than with "ideas" in the normal science-fictional sense. Why is this? Has your writing in fact undergone a change?

I've wondered that myself. It's true that as I enter middle age I find my attention dwelling more in the area of feeling and less in conceptual thought. You don't think it could be the onset of maturity, do you? My God, I hope not.

They're not necessarily recent stories. Since my mid-twenties I've had similar "feeling" stories in mind, but they are far more difficult for me to write. Simple though they may seem at the finish, there has sometimes been a lot of hammering at the forge before I've got the effect I want, and unsatisfactory drafts – or simply notes for stories – might lie in the file for years or decades, taken out and given another trial every now and then. The first few drafts of "Tommy Atkins," for example, could have been exercises in how not to write a story, full of wordy lectures.

Do you see yourself as a British writer, carrying on a specifically British tradition of sf?

No, I don't think in terms of national traditions or tendencies. My early exposure to sf was all American, anyway. I've read reviewers who say my short stuff follows a British line of descent, but it was news to me. I'm not really interested in that sort of demarcation.

How involved were you with *New Worlds* magazine during the period of Michael Moorcock's editorship in the 1960s, and to what extent did the whole "New Wave" thing affect your writing?

Hardly at all. I lived practically round the corner from Mike, but at that stage in my life I wasn't mixing much. Mike's place always seemed to be full of people and I felt my crowd phobia coming on. As for the New Wave, I think it pretty much passed me by, like the sexual revolution I kept hearing we were having around that time.

Which, if any, of the following sf writers have particularly impressed you, and why: H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, Robert A. Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Ursula K. Le Guin?

Anyone who can write good science fiction impresses me. Wells and Stapledon are still the giants. Their vision was new and that still shows; there's a transcendence to it. Even now I think of *First Men in the Moon* as the best narrative description of an alien society. What it must have been like to read when it was first published...

After that, Dick for his quirky thinking.

Are there any other writers (not just sf people) you particularly admire or who have influenced your work?

Literature as such is a peripheral interest with me and so I'm not well read, not at all. I'd like to be, but there's so much of it! When I go into a bookshop, particularly a secondhand one stuffed with 19th-century volumes slowly turning to dust, I get a suffocating feeling and sometimes start to choke with horror. So many billions of written words! Where did mankind find the energy for all that application, that mental toil, that persistence, that human observation, that sheer ability?

How could one ever cope with it all?

Besides, I find reading hard work. So I've read a bit of this and a bit of that. The most powerful novelist I know is Balzac, who I prefer to Tolstoy who I gather usually runs off with the Best Novelist Ever prize. I suppose Tolstoy's literary skill is unsurpassable, but I'm just knocked out by Balzac's force of expression, and his penetration into human character which has been termed diabolical. Above all he lacks the gloss of Christian sentimentality which is perhaps Tolstoy's chief merit. The novel to have moved me most is probably Balzac's *Eugenie Grandet*, which carries both of Balzac's recurring themes – obsession (in the form of the miser, old man Grandet), and the theme of an innocent soul helpless in a corrupt world. I find it interesting to compare this book with Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Both are masterpieces and have the same elementary theme, but in every other way are opposite. One can't help but love and feel sorry for Eugenie, for whom only one thing happens in her whole monotonous life, but Anna is an uninteresting woman of whom there are at least twenty in every street.

Balzac showed philosophical interests and had he lived in modern society might well have done some superb science fiction. I love the bit in the first chapter of *The Quest of the Absolute* where a scientist bitterly complains at someone interrupting his work. "In another few minutes I might have decomposed oxygen!"

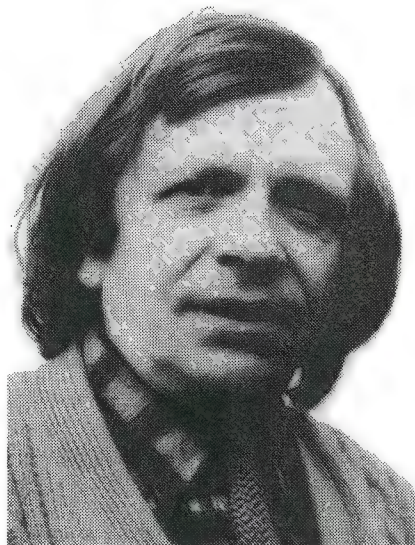
I've also been inspired and refreshed, practically rescued from literary despair, in fact, by William Burroughs. **How did you get started as an sf writer? We know you published a short story in collaboration with Mike Moorcock (as "Michael Barrington") in 1959, but what were you doing before that, and how did you meet Mike?**

I never did get started, I seem always to have been toddling along on unsteady two-year-old legs, plopping down and reverting to all fours every now and then (and no, I'm not talking about booze). I wrote my first submitted story longhand and got somebody to type it up, then bought a second-hand portable typewriter – I'd be fifteen or sixteen – and shortly afterwards started getting pieces in the British mags, but only itsy-bitsy ones.

It was a marvellous typewriter, an American machine (I forget the make) and really fast. I did everything on it for the next twenty years, until my infant son, in a precocious act of literary criticism, battered it into uselessness with a poker.

Mike Ashley lists my first published story as "Combat's End" in the *Vargo Statten Magazine*, 1954. My own memory of the time is vague.

I met Mike Moorcock in the Globe,



London's sf venue at the time, where we used to meet every Thursday. I think it was Thursday. I'd be twenty or twenty-one, and he a bit younger, and he might still have been editing the Tarzan comic. I'd not long before finished national service. Later we did some collaborating.

If you were writing sf from the 1950s, why was it such a long time before your first novel, *The Star Virus*, appeared in 1970?

I'm a slow, halting person, as I have intimated. Things can take a long time with me. Up to the age of eighteen I was keen but didn't have much idea how to proceed. The longest story I tackled (unpublished) was ten or twelve thousand words. Looking at Ashley's bibliography, I see a story in *New Worlds* in 1967, "Aid to Nothing," that was actually written in 1953 or 1954. I'll bet it shows, too.

Then call-up meant a two-year hiatus. I can see now what a bad thing that was. When I came out I settled in London and tried to apply myself. It was dreadful. In the interim my writing ideas had become eccentric and forced. No understanding of plot, pace, dialogue or even sentence construction, and often relying on incomprehensible notions – utterly unreadable. Though one of the first stories I did fell out quite well, by accident probably – "All the King's Men" – and another later got turned into the novel *Empire of Two Worlds*. Still, I plugged haphazardly on, moronically refusing to believe I couldn't write despite the world's attempts to give me reality testing. Meantime I worked at unenjoyable jobs or else starved. I applied for a job at the BBC, but realized I had come to the wrong place when I was asked if I had sung in the school choir. The interviewer openly sneered at my social origins. This was the fifties, remember.

Then Mike Moorcock introduced me to the freelance juvenile field. For a while we worked in partnership, but the Moorcock powerhouse was some-

thing up with which there was no way I could keep (see, sentence construction). Writing boys' stories was an instructive experience. I soon had to learn that there was such a thing as plot, with its amazing (to me) rules such as that (in that genre) the hero must be seen to win by his own efforts – not somebody else's. I continued with that for some years, making a comfortable living, before I got browned off with it and stopped. I decided to write some science fiction novels instead, and by that time it was 1970. And look, now it's 1990, and where has all the time gone?

Tell us something about the once-famous financial difficulties you had with the publishers Allison & Busby. What happened there, and how did it affect your career?

Yes, well. It's simple really. A&B didn't bother to render accounts, let alone pay earnings. This was doubly annoying because I had given them control over some translation rights, and I was getting offers which I was passing on, in other words, I was shovelling money into A&B's pocket and getting none of it myself. You can imagine what that's like when you're trying to bring up a family and you're next to broke.

For a long time I did nothing about it because I had contracted for the two sequels to *The Soul of the Robot* and had got blocked on the first one, and was embarrassed at not delivering. Eventually I finished it, and, honour satisfied, asked for accounts. Then the fun began. It quickly became obvious there were not going to be any accounts or any payment, though to my amazement A&B typeset the sequel as though nothing had happened, probably thinking, we may as well shaft that Bayley idiot one more time with one more book, and a first edition to boot. I made it clear they could not publish without first fulfilling their contracts, and that was the end of direct correspondence between us.

Taking it through the court, of course, took a long time. First thing was, I needed the right kind of lawyer and I found that literary solicitors won't take legal aid cases, but I got help there and was steered to someone very effective. So we sued, and then when we got the accounts we sued again, because they revealed that about 2,800 hardcover copies had been remaindered for 25p apiece without my being told (by contract I should have been offered them first). The High Court made poor old A&B pay over the money owed, with interest, but they went insolvent before costs could be extracted so I was stuck with those, just under £2,000.

We went ahead with the remaindering case on principle, even though the official receiver had made it plain there would be no money for anyone but the taxman. It was great – it brought a tear

to my jaundiced eye to see how ready people were to help. Dave Tate and Mike Moorcock gave evidence, and there were sworn affidavits from Rog Peyton and Mike Butterworth, all saying how much I could have made if I had been allowed to buy the books. The recorder stopped totting up the damages when he reached the maximum the county court was empowered to award – £5,000. A symbolic victory, of course. I'm not certain if that was the first case to be brought over contractual remaindering, but there certainly can't have been many, and it may have set some kind of precedent.

That wasn't the end of the support I found coming to me. An auction was got up at the 1987 worldcon to allay my costs. I was almost too bewildered by that to feel gratitude, as well as a bit embarrassed, naturally – ask Malcolm Edwards about my blushes when I next saw him! Quite a few people were involved in that; I never did see a list of contributors. It made me realize what a positive force the sf community is.

If they've a mind to publishers can get away with quite a lot, since the cards are stacked against the author who is in a position of trust and often lacks the means or the will to take action if he thinks he is being cheated. So if a publisher is in financial difficulties there is a great temptation not to pay the author or even tell him what he's owed. Anyway the world's lousy

with passable writers, there are always more where he came from.

A&B owed authors £135,456 according to the official receiver's report.

What do you think of the state of the world today? Daft question, we know, but we're thinking in particular of the recently-fashionable concern for the environment, the depletion of the ozone layer, etc. Are there any Bayley "fixes" for humankind's predicament?

What do you think I am, some kind of futurologist technocrat? I was with some people recently who talked of global disaster in forty years if something isn't done. As there are no examples of successful long or medium term prediction of weather or climate, I don't know how seriously to take these warnings. Personally I shan't start to worry until I have to climb the Wrekin to escape the rising sea water. (It's a big hill near my home.)

To take the large view, any self-caused environmental difficulties for mankind only add to those thrown at us by nature. Earth's climate is not steady-state.

Assuming the air-raid siren is sounding for good reason, an environmental crisis is likely to force the pace of some interesting developments. I'm enough of an old-fashioned technophile to think that physical problems are capable of solution. The first step is reliable prediction. The recent stuff about chaotic attractors has demonstrated how difficult it is to predict the

behaviour of multi-term systems. But I'm sure that with enough computing power, and a proper understanding of the forces involved, it can be done. Once that's mastered it may not be all that much of a trick to do just about anything with the Earth habitat that you want. A number of means suggest themselves for controlling the overall planetary temperature: choose the easiest. So long as civilization survives, that kind of variability will be a thing of the past: the Earth will have a thermostat on it, adjustable at will.

Then we start arguing about who is to have the nicest weather.

That's the crux of it, really: the social issue. A while ago I wrote an article predicting that the 21st century would become an imperial age, because the increasing availability of devastating weapons would allow small states to destroy large ones, and that would have to be curbed. It's rather like living in a big house full of people, some of them lunatic, some psychopathic, but everybody with a machine gun. The machine guns would have to be taken away from those who are a danger to others. The impact of economic activity on the environment – or even local attempts at weather control – could become a similar consideration, and force political order on a planetary scale.

And now I'm tired, and I'd like to go and lie down and get some sleep. Thank you.

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Celebrity Love

Thomas M. Disch

1.
“She’s cute, isn’t she,” Vanessa observed to the reporter at her side, a young man who wrote for and, parsimoniously, was called Art. “A true starlet.”

“Pure M-G-M,” he agreed with puppyish eagerness to please. “But doesn’t that worry you? Her youth, her beauty.”

“Beauty? I wouldn’t go that far. Beauty is a quality of stardom. Starlets possess something more fragile and elusive. Nothing’s harder to paint than cute. Could you move a little to the left, you’re casting a shadow. Thank you.”

“Since this report is print and sound only,” the reporter confided to his wire, “I should explain to our subscribers that Mrs O’Day is working with *direct sunlight* here in the blistering heat amid the romantic ruins of the Miami Hilton, where many of the greatest celebrities of yesteryear came, like millions of other Americans, to worship the sun. How much the world has changed in so little time. There are no sun-worshippers in Miami these days. There is almost no one here at all except for graphic great Vanessa O’Day and her guest Daphne Lear, the actress who has been creating so much talk with her portrayal of Melanie’s great-granddaughter Clarissa in the smash soap *Gone with the Wind: the Fourth Generation*. Mrs O’Day, let me ask you —”

“Vanessa, please.”

“Why Miami?”

“Because, in a word, it’s so sinister. The empty buildings, the sunken highways, the crumbling bungalows. This morning, on the gondola coming here, I captured the loveliest scene: a little Spanish grocery store, a *bodega*, that had become a nest of alligators. Where else could one shoot such pictures?”

“But doesn’t it make you worry, being out in the sun for hours at a time?”

“My dear, when I was your age, I used to come to Florida on purpose to get a tan. Having lived this long unharmed by the sunlight, I feel I must have a natural immunity. But poor Daphne, up there on the diving board, in her antebellum ball gown, she’s not used to so much light. She is suffering, very likely. But that’s something you should talk to her about. I’m sure she’d love to be interviewed. Though she won’t have much to say that the press has not already been advised of. Her favourite colour is blue. Her favourite pastime is my husband. But if you ask her about Miami, she’ll only tell you it’s nice. Daphne will not say anything that might give offence. She would suppose that

Floridians, those that remain, would take umbrage at the suggestion that the hellhole they live in is not simply one of the warmer areas of Paradise. She’s the sort of girl who learned at age six that she must never frown or she’ll develop wrinkles. But that’s what makes it such a wonderful face to photograph. The perfect rondure of the cheeks and brow, the crispness of the smile, like a doll’s face, or Garbo’s.”

“It doesn’t sound like you have a very high regard for Daphne Lear.”

“I don’t have much use for her, that’s another matter. But even that’s not quite so, for I am using her, aren’t I? As the subject of the work-in-progress.”

“Does it have a title at this point?”

“Its working title is ‘Nadar, Nader, Nadir,’ but Gregory, that’s Gregory Blossom, at NEA, thinks that’s too hoity-toity. He says why not just ‘Nightmares,’ and he may be right. Shadow!”

“Excuse me.” He stepped back to the mossy edge of the pool.

“What I’m exploring is my darkest fears and apprehensions,” she continued matter-of-factly, all the while plucking image after image from the scene before her and zapping them back to her studio in Vancouver to be processed into a salable aesthetic product in the fullness of time. “Daphne, of course, represents an obvious apprehension. I’m sixty-two; she’s twenty-three; Sean’s twenty-seven. Sean and I have been together four years. Need I draw a map? Though in a sense, that’s just what I’m doing with this series: painting *their* love, as I conceive it, or misconceive it, as the case may be. But love isn’t *all* there is, so I introduce other related themes. Greenhouses, because of the Greenhouse Effect (and because I love hothouse flowers); skin diseases; nostalgia for the ’70s, because that’s when people first began to understand that they were destroying the world and went right ahead doing it; alligators, if this morning’s shots turn out to be as good as I think they were. And celebrities, of course. I always paint celebrities.”

“And why is that, Vanessa?”

“Basically, I suppose, because I’ve been so well funded by the National Endowment that I’m free to paint whom I choose. Painters have always painted *political* celebrities, popes and doges and crowned heads, but those who weren’t lucky enough to be a Velázquez also had to paint merchants and wives and other *ignotos*, or Unknown Young Men. And that can be risky. Paint enough *ignotos*, and you may wind up an *ignoto* yourself. So once I became a celebrity, I

made it my policy never to paint anyone who was not a celebrity as well. It's not my idea, of course. Warhol was there before any of us. While other painters were still painting their patrons, he was painting Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe."

The reporter was looking antsy. What he was after wasn't a lesson in art history. He wanted to know about Sean and Daphne, were they really in love, was Vanessa's heart breaking. But Vanessa had long believed that her little lectures on aesthetics were an essential ingredient of her own celebrity status, a testimony to her painterly professionalism and a foible that served as a trademark, like Dali's waxed moustache or Stacy Keach's harelip.

"So tell me, Mrs O'Day —" (She didn't bother to correct him.) "— why have you asked Daphne to pose on the top of a diving board in that old-fashioned dress? Is that your way of getting revenge, perhaps?"

"Revenge? My dear, anyone in her position — in the world at large, that is, not on the diving board — knows that to have been painted by me is a notch on her gun. If I felt vindictive, I would ignore her: she'd feel that. But Sean asked me, as a special favour, to paint her, and I can refuse Sean nothing."

"And why is that, Vanessa?" He thrust the mike so close he seemed to be offering her a bite of it.

"Because Sean is sexual dynamite."

"Could you... elaborate?"

"Yes, but not about my sex life. I'm protective of my privacy, except for what I necessarily reveal in my art. What I wanted to speak of earlier was the light here in Miami, and why it's so special, for a painter. You know, Turner, who was surely the greatest painter of his century, though a terrible self-publicist, Turner worshipped Venice, as did Whistler. They both lived in Chelsea, for the light, and when that light would grow dim, off they'd go to Venice. I'm just the same. But now Venice is here, in Miami." She broke off to call to Daphne across the length of the pool: "Daphne, could you fluff up your crinolines? They're starting to sag with the damp."

"I can't hear you!" Daphne called back. "Are you done yet? I'm getting dizzy up here."

"Just a few more minutes, dear. Gregory says the stand-in will be here any minute." Then, turning back to the reporter, in the dulcet tone of connoisseurship: "The beauty of Venice then, and of Miami now, is the beauty of incipient and irreversible decay. There is one church there, Saint Somebody's, where the dome cracked open like a Fabergé Easter egg, and you could look down into the church from your helicopter at an enormous Titian madonna who was being assumed into heaven just as the tide began to come in over the altar. People ran a gorgeous picture of that, and of the painting's helicopter rescue, back when you — and Miss Button-nose on the high dive — would have been in Pampers. It was as though Fellini had been put in charge of history for a day."

"Did you know Madonna personally?" the reporter asked, desperate to move Vanessa away from high culture.

"Darling," she said, "that's a lovely segue. Don't edit it out, whatever you do. And to answer your question, yes, Madonna was a dear, dear friend. You can see my portrait of her in the Modern. Or you could at one point. I think they've de-accessioned it. I don't

know if it was my stock that dropped or hers. But that's beside the point. The point is Venice, and its light. Walls of masonry flooded with light reflected up from the canals. That's why Venice is uniquely beautiful. Or was: we have a hundred Venices now. But of them all, Miami is my personal favourite. These wonderful glass towers flaking, pane by pane, into the sea! The seaweed in the swimming pools! Sharks gliding by Art Deco nightclubs and through the windows of flamingo-pink suburban villas! It's a surrealist dream come true."

Every image was plagiarized from her first husband's first novel, *Miami, 2002 A.D.*, but the reporter wasn't likely to know that. The option had never been picked up, and so for all practical purposes the book no longer existed, but its initial publication had been enough, along with the power of his father's literary coattails, to pull David up to the first rung of the celebrity ladder, where he and Vanessa had met. Her painting at that point had been exactly as third-rate as David's fiction, but her art had flourished under whatever rays they are that are shed by the spotlight of success, while his had withered like a bargain basement bonsai, until he was reduced to the desperate expedient of writing his father's biography, complete with a searing (and mostly speculative) account of his death by AIDS. Poor David had always lacked a sense of timing. At that point no one wanted to hear another word on that subject.

All the chatter had finally emptied Vanessa's mind to the point where she could make quick decisions. She walked to the far side of the pool and squatted to make a red chalk mark on the moss-crusted terrazzo paving stone. "We'll shoot from here."

Then Gregory called from the kiosk that had once been the poolside bar and now served as Vanessa's communication centre, announcing the arrival of the stand-in.

"Have you wet him down?" she asked.

"He's sopping."

"Fine, bring him here. I want to see him up close."

Gregory led the stand-in around the pool. From a distance he produced a reasonably Sean-like gestalt. Good definition. Skin of the same sun-shielded pallid swarthy, or swarthy pallor. The hair as short as Sean's. A similar curl to the lip.

"Gregory, you deserve at least an A-minus. And so quickly." She tossed him the camera. "Take just a couple of quick shots of us in a clinch, with Daphne over my right shoulder."

Gregory positioned himself on one knee and said, "Say when."

Vanessa put her hands on the stand-in's bare wet shoulders. "You've seen my husband making love, haven't you? I mean in his movies."

"I guess I must of seen most all of his movies," the boy replied. "I'm probably his number-one fan." His voice was musical but in a cheap way, with the twang of a jew's-harp as against the lilt of Sean's alto clarinet.

"Good. Now I want you to put your arms around me, it doesn't matter that you're wet, and give me a passionate kiss. Just the way Sean did in *Teen Pimp*. Okay?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"Ready?"

"Any time."

She positioned her hands on his slippery shoulder blades and leaned backwards, letting his forearms take more and more weight. His lips pressed down on hers, his tongue asked to come in, her own lips softening into a smile of compliance, and she let her back and neck relax, like the limb of a tree yielding to the weight of some large mammal, a badger or a raccoon. She was a bowstring being drawn tauter and tauter by the invisible hand of the public's regard, its need to have the welter of the disintegrating world focused into the significant fiction of a celebrity's kiss.

When they'd unclinked, Vanessa went over to the screen in the kiosk to see what they had. The stand-in tagged along like a gosling newly imprinted with an image of its mother.

"Perfect," she said. "Except for Button-nose up there on the diving board, who looks like she's waiting for a bus. But I can strip in another shot of her with no difficulty. That was nice, thanks." She patted the stand-in's satiny trunks.

"We're done?"

"We're done, but that was the easy part. Now I want you in the water, under the diving board, treading water and looking up at Daphne. I'll be at the bottom of the pool, shooting up past a rear view of you at her face."

He nodded comprehension. "Can I ask you...?" His harmonica phrased the unasked question with the clarity of a birdcall.

"Honey, you can ask me anything. We've kissed."

"Are Sean and Daphne really a number, or is this, like, publicity for her career?"

"I doubt if even Daphne knows the answer to that. I certainly don't. As for Sean, he's a true lily of the field. Not that he doesn't toil and spin. But he is utterly an impulse buyer, and at some point, surely, he'll stop reaching for me. After all, I'm sixty-two."

In fact, she was fifty-eight, but the media had no reason to call her bluff on that. The extra four years added drama.

"You're still glamorous," the stand-in insisted politely.

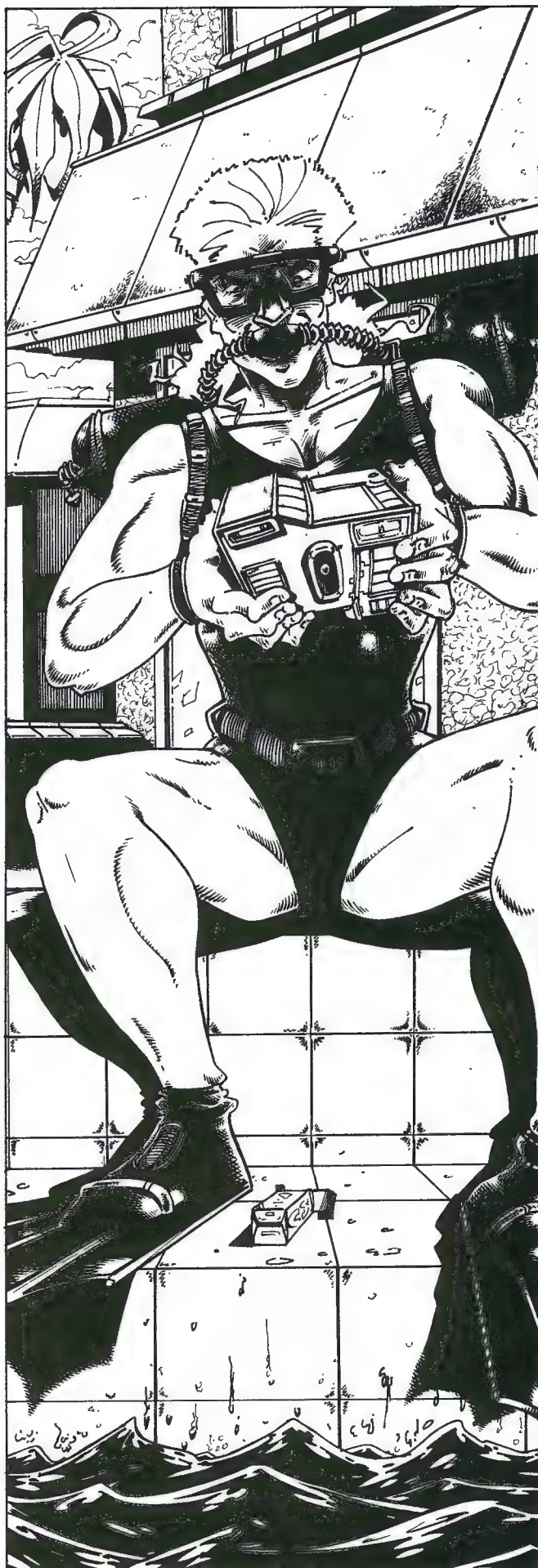
She nodded. "Sixty-three in July. And I ask myself, how long can I hope to command the affection of someone so much younger, a boy really, who only graduated from high school four years ago, a boy who's loaded with talent, and makes love like Hormel makes sausages? One of these days Sean will move on, the only questions are when and to whom? Whoever it is, I want to be the recording angel. I want the tears copyright in my name. Oh, I like that: 'the copyright on my tears.' I hope the boy from Art got that. Where did he go?"

"Right behind you," the reporter said, saluting with his mike. "That was great, Mrs O'Day. Thanks a whole lot. But I do wish you could let us have just one picture our subscribers could hang on their walls."

"The visuals are mine, sweetheart. That's how I earn my living, remember?"

"Just one close-up of you and Sean getting tender with each other? Leave Daphne out of it altogether?"

"This isn't Sean, sweetheart. As my manager already explained, my husband's been unavoidably detained by monsoon winds in the Gulf of Mexico.



Illustrations by Mike Hadley

To my own personal desolation and Miss Lear's great distress. I can't help the weather, that's up to God, and though God has been a great comfort to me throughout my career, and you can quote me on that, today He seems determined to keep Sean and me apart. Or perhaps it's a favour, maybe it's Sean and Daphne that God is keeping apart. In any case, Sean can't be here."

"But if I just shot the stand-in from in back, like you were doing, with you looking at me over his shoulder," the reporter wheedled, "who would know?"

"We're sorry," Gregory interposed. "But those are the rules, no visuals. The National Endowment doesn't make exceptions."

"Isn't he a tyrant?" Vanessa commiserated. "Sometimes I feel like a product on a shelf."

"As long as the product moves, that should be a good feeling," Gregory remarked unironically.

"The product is moving."

Vanessa slipped off her Mylar sunrobe and draped it over the counter of the kiosk. She wiggled her feet into frog-fins and shrugged herself into the scuba gear and waved at Daphne to be ready to dive. Then she pulled the mask down over her face and clipped the camera, tiara-like, to the top of the mask so that whatever she saw she would also be shooting. "Oopsy-daizie," she said, and let gravity tumble her backwards into the warm and briny water of the pool.

2.

Though she, more than any painter alive, had benefited from the defenestration of the civilized world, what was left of it, a large part of Vanessa's studio was naturally lighted by windows and skylights, and these were the rooms she most liked to be in, not so much for their views of her garden and of the bay, but because there really was a difference between the light of heaven, even a punishing heaven whose rays were scourges, and the light emitted by a window installation, however sophisticated its programming. Raw sunlight varied from minute to minute, and all the sunlit world varied with it. For centuries these variations had been the special province of painters, whose eyes (she believed) had a special aptitude for sorting through the flux, for defining, like the shutter of a camera, the instant and then (which a camera can't do) for collating the sum of them into an image that was one's own decision, not a shake of the sun's infinite dice; into, if one were theologically inclined, an idol.

For that it what all painters were, and she, therefore, an idol-maker, whatever the subject was Mont Ste.-Victoire, or a plate of fruit, or, as now, the face of Daphne Lear at the instant (and the next, and next) it impacted with the water in a Miami swimming pool, the eyes tight-shut and lips compressed, and then, striking and shattering the prism of the water, becoming a jar of flesh-coloured jelly-beans, among which Vanessa's fibre-optic brush picked and chose, highlighting the fractured line of the jaw with a glint of canary yellow, re-forming the curve of an auburn curl, until the face on the matte-white work-screen had been reassembled into a mask that bore, once more, a passing resemblance to the face of Daphne Lear, not as any camera had ever seen her, but as she existed in Vanessa's mind, a Hockney reinterpreted by Braque.

She froze the image, inverted it, and saw at once what she'd done that didn't work, though not how to correct it. She tapped the SAVE key with the other end of the brush, and the face on the screen shrank to a star of light and winked out. She aimed the remote at the windows and the louvres closed. As the studio grew dim, a mural kicked in, and the studio was flooded with the shimmering of a pendulum image of Sean's stand-in treading water in the pool. His legs lifted and straightened, lifted and straightened, fifteen seconds of real time, then the same fifteen seconds in reverse. In a month, or less, a million living rooms would enjoy the same view. *God bless the National Endowment for the Arts*, thought Vanessa, and *God bless my mommy and daddy*. She did not, selfishly, include herself in her prayers, trusting in God to repair the omission.

"Any calls?" she asked the remote.

The speakers replied: "David, called, again."

"What does he want?"

"He wants, to talk, to you. He gives, no, reason. I have his number. He will be, in, now."

"All right. I'll return the call. Interrupt after five minutes if he's still on the line."

"Yes, Vanessa."

Vanessa had no real antipathy for her first husband. He could bandy about words as well as, once, he'd played tennis, tolerably well. The problem with David was that he was always after a quid but had no quo to offer in return.

"Vanessa?" the speakers asked, in a well-modulated tenor whine.

"Speaking."

"Can't we see each other? Is there something wrong with your cam?"

"My cam's fine, and so am I. But my grant doesn't allow me to scatter my persona about promiscuously. As you well know."

"You might at least take off the audio mask. This is like talking to a robot."

"You are talking to a robot, sweetheart, but every word it utters is an echo of my loving heart. What's up?"

"I just wanted to breeze."

"You've called three times today, so I assume you have a purpose."

"It's not money. I'm not asking for a loan."

"You're up for a Guggenheim, and want me to testify to your genius, is that it?"

"I like to talk to you. But okay, I got a favour to ask. Not for me. For Paloma."

"Paloma?" She knew, of course, whom he meant. There weren't that many Palomas in the world. But she never gave David an inch.

"Paloma Updike, my intended."

"That's news. When did she form that intention? Paloma Updike, my goodness."

"It was news a month ago, Vanessa. Now it's ancient history. She sends her love, by the way."

"I send mine, in twice the amount. So what favour does she ask?"

"She's hoping you'll be able to come to the Moonlight Foundation Benefit at the Chateaubriand on the fifth of June. She's on the board."

"What is the Moonlight Foundation?"

"Oh, come on, Vanessa!"

"Seriously. I've never heard of it. Isn't moonlighting when someone works at a second job they're not supposed to?"

"The Moonlight Foundation sends dying children to the moon."

"Why on earth do they do that?"

"You'll have to ask a dying child. It's what they've wished for. The Moonlight Foundation helps make dreams come true. It's a charity."

"Why not just cure them?"

"That's not always possible. But they can be sent to the moon. Though 'they' isn't quite accurate. So far they've only orbited one kid. Surely you've heard of him: *Jason Bieler*."

"It doesn't ring a bell. Did he get back? He wasn't just dumped there with the toxic wastes and such?"

"He came back, and then he died, and there was a four-part miniseries about the whole thing. You've really never heard of Jason Bieler?"

"What can I say, I'm out of touch. And there's a whole foundation to send more dying children to the moon, and bring them back, and make another miniseries? And Paloma's in charge of it? That's astonishing."

"So, can you come to the benefit?" David demanded testily.

"Shouldn't you answer my questions first?"

David had to pause at that, but he was able to remember both questions, which was an indication that he wasn't drinking. If it was four o'clock here in Vancouver, it would have been eight o'clock in the Berkshires, or nine. Good for David.

"No," he said, "most dying children have more modest ambitions. They want to go to the North Pole and be photographed shaking hands with Santa Claus or some other celebrity. The benefit gets good network ratings, especially with kids. Most kids under sixteen seem to think they've got some kind of incurable terminal illness like Budry's syndrome, so there's strong identification. It's not like when we were that age. Kids today are anxious, they need reassurance, romance. They need to dream."

"Stop, you're breaking my heart, I'll come. Tell Gregory to put it on my calendar."

"You will? I mean, that's wonderful, Paloma will be delighted. Doubly delighted if you could convince Sean to come with you. For a lot of those kids a chance to shake hands with the star of *Young and Deadly* would be as big a thrill as a trip to the moon. Not that you're not a headliner yourself, but I don't have to spell out the demographics."

"Darling," she lied, "the timer rang, I have to go meditate. See you in Antarctica?"

"Right," he said, woundedly, for he knew he was being hung up on. "Ciao."

3.

Celebrities tend to migrate, like birds, in flocks, but while they once had followed the sun, flying south for the winter and returning north for the summer, now they reversed this propensity, which had already proven fatal for many species of migratory fowl. As the tilt of the planet's axis favoured one hemisphere or the other with longer hours of sheltering darkness, those who could afford such mobility flocked north for their winters, south for their summers.

Nothing was more chic than to spend the actual solstice holidays within the charmed, sunless circles of 30° latitude north or south. Not that visitors to those polar regions would have ever left the snug interiors of their resort hotels to brave the elements. Had they come in the off-season, like ordinary mortals, they'd probably have exposed themselves to no more actual natural light.

The Chateaubriand was a kind of catacomb excavated from the core of the largest iceberg ever to have calved from the icecap of the Antarctic continent. The interiors were modelled on those of the *Titanic*, and some of the décor of its public rooms were said to be salvaged from the ocean liner's actual wreck at reportedly unthinkable expense (though Vanessa had been told, in confidence, that that was just hype from the resort's p.r. office). In any case, the Chateaubriand was in the Seven Wonders category, a marvel of uselessness and conspicuous consumption, with the further frisson of its built-in obsolescence. Icebergs, in their nature, are always diminishing. Each year the Chateaubriand's prospects for survival were a little dimmer, and in that it was a paradigm for the biosphere itself.

After she'd unpacked and ventured forth from her stateroom, Vanessa tried to steal a few minutes of private sight-seeing (the Chateaubriand's collection of animal paintings was of museum quality), but she'd only got to the Géricault, the Stubbs, and a sweet, thoughtful cow by Cuyp before Paloma Updike was upon her, insisting that she come at once to the reception in the grand ballroom, where Archbishop Quine, the prime mover of the Moonlight Foundation, was dying to meet her.

A.P. Quine had become famous twenty years earlier for his incredible good luck in winning a succession of seven-figure state lotteries. He must have been cheating but no one had ever figured out how, and finally, after an appeals court ruled that he could not be kept from gambling by legal statute, the state of New Jersey persuaded him to retire from his career as a lottery winner by threatening (privately) to delete him if he persisted. (At least such was the implication of the ABC docudrama based on his early life; Quine denied it, and the state of New Jersey had no comment.) Quine then became a religious dignitary, an Archbishop in the American Pelagian Church. His weekly poop sheet and TV chats on the science of Christian numerology offered his millions of followers an infallible solution to the problem of how to survive and prosper in a world falling apart at the seams: Get lucky! Quine also sponsored an interfaith satellite bingo hour that raked in a tax-free million dollars a day. And every cent that Lady Luck deposited in Quine's piggy bank he reinvested in rubbing shoulders, et al., with the rich and famous. In appearance he favoured the mature Elvis Presley, and his life style was marked by a similar godlike capriciousness. He bestowed benefactions with an aleatory disregard for merit, need, or poetic justice.

In theory all this made Quine a figure of great fascination, but in practice he was a bore and a fuddy-duddy. He held forth, he dropped names, he echoed yesterday's network editorials. If he hadn't been a celebrity, he would have been a pariah, but (Vanessa reminded herself) he was footing the bill, and a week



at the Chateaubriand was a major item on anyone's budget. It behooved her to be civil, and Quine's garrulity made that an easy task. She had only to be a good listener: Is that so. You don't say. How interesting.

"Wouldn't you like to empty a punch bowl over his head?" Paloma Updike commented, when Quine went off to welcome the next big fish another of his go-fers had steered into the ballroom.

"You must think of the cause you're serving," Vanessa advised.

"Vanessa, don't be snide. The foundation actually does a lot of good work."

"I wasn't thinking of the Moonlight Foundation. The cause I had in mind was the upkeep of this wonderful hotel. It's only charity benefits and business conventions on this kind of scale that keep such leviathans afloat."

Paloma received this ungraciously. She worked very hard at her fund-raising, to the degree that she risked being perceived as an organizer rather than a celebrity in her own right. "I'm sorry to hear that Sean won't be here," she said with x=null-x sarcasm of the humour-impaired. She meant that she was exulting in the latest news about Sean, who was in jail again.

"Sorry? You shouldn't be. I'm sure the whole thing is nothing but a publicity stunt. I wouldn't be surprised to hear he rehearses these drunken brawls beforehand, the way wrestlers do."

"How in the world do you deal with it?"

"As most problems are best dealt with, by ignoring it. As long as he doesn't become violent with me, and he never has, it's really no concern of mine."

"And the women? They're not your problem?"

"Paloma, you've missed your calling. You should have been a talk-show host. You've got just the tone of breathless confidentiality that's required."

"That doesn't answer the question."

"Well, by comparison to David, for instance, it's been nice having a spouse whose appetite for sex exceeds my own. Not that I'm voracious, mind you, but men generally do have less emotional stamina over the long haul. But Sean is young, and he's a star, and stars need to be worshipped in order to know they're stars. And I can't be expected to do that for him. But as a wife, I'm just what he needs, because I'm a star myself. Stars must marry other stars, like royalty. Anthropologists have a word for it: endogamy."

"All I can say is, if David starts to behave like Sean after we're married, he's had it."

"Now you're talking like royalty: that's just what you ought to say, as a professional role model."

Paloma touched the tip of a finger to the central emerald of her necklace as though depositing Vanessa's remark into the coffer where she stored all compliments paid her. She had the aplomb that only the thick and famous can command. It was what had made her such a good model back in the days of her teenage glory touring malls for Bloomingdale's. Such a good role model, too, for that matter. Vanessa hadn't been sarcastic. How else can the stupid scions of celebrity face the world except by assuming princely airs? People who've worked for their fame never have the afflatus of those for whom fame is a birthright.

"If you ever have the time," Vanessa said, "I love to do a double wedding portrait of you and David."

As royalty. Would you like that?"

So much did Paloma like it that her ego fairly split the seams of her gentility. She began to babble about what one might wear in the way of orbs and sceptres, to wonder aloud where one shops for crowns.

Vanessa cooperated for a while in helping Paloma plan a regal wardrobe, then disengaged and began to circulate about the ballroom, touching base from face to known face, absorbing the drinks and canapés as they floated by on the waiters' silver trays as a whale might harvest the krill it swims through, thoroughly in her element.

An hour later, when Vanessa's party mode had slowed to idle and she was sitting in an apse of the ballroom, watching a holographic herd of bison having a party of their own, she felt a tug on the cuff of her hand-loomed Marcantonio burnoose, and a peculiar piping voice sliced through the audio cocoon of Dvořák to which the bison's ruminations had been keyed.

"Excuse me? Hello? Mrs O'Day?"

"Vanessa, please," she responded.

"Vanessa!" the little voice shrilled. "Oh, this is the most unbe-lieve-able moment of my whole life, this really is a Dream Come True, you're my favourite artist in the whole world, including Picasso and Sendak. Do you mind if I interview you for my bulletin board, it's called Gretchen Spandau's S.O.S., that's my name, Gretchen Spandau, I'm one of the lucky kids the Moonlight people brought down here for our dreams to come true, and they really are."

Vanessa looked down at a wizened gargoyle of a girl in a motorized body brace. She was of that indeterminate age between six and sixty characteristic of those afflicted with Budry's syndrome, a hormonal disorder that simultaneously inhibits growth and accelerates aging. Atop her sparkling Little Debbie fashion wig was a goldenish crown whose synthetic jewels spelled out the word PRINCESS, identifying her as a Foundation award recipient. Vanessa felt that instant pang of sympathy, horror, and unreasoning guilt that was her invariable response to deformed people and the unhappier animals in zoos.

"An interview," she echoed tardily, forcing a smile. "Why, of course. When would you...?"

"Would now be okay?" Gretchen Spandau's little fingers pecked at the keyboard integrated into her body brace, and a long flexible Minolta arched up from behind the tresses of the fashion wig, like a cobra from a snake charmer's basket, and aimed its tiny black bead of an eye at Vanessa.

She did not have the moral courage to make her usual demand that the interview be audio only. She beamed a smile at the camera's eye. "What would you like to know, Gretchen?"

"First, could you tell us what is your favourite colour?"

"No, I can't: painters aren't supposed to have favourite colours. Suppose I said that red was my favourite colour: people who'd bought a painting of mine that didn't have a patch of red in it might feel cheated. Actually, come to think of it, white's my favourite colour. The pure after-the-blizzard white of a new canvas or a blank window. *Tabula rasa* white."

"What do you think of the Moonlight Foundation

sending *Brad Lighthouse* and other dying children to the moon?"

"I think it's a fine way to waste money."

"Why are you so sarcastic all the time?"

"In fact, I don't think I am. I generally try to say just what I think, and very often that strikes people as sarcastic."

"What you just said about wasting money, wasn't that sarcastic?"

"Not at all. Call it conspicuous consumption, if you prefer. People who have lots of money like to dramatize the fact, and people who don't, like to have their observers on the scene. That's our job, that's why we're here tonight – to report on the ways the rich waste their money."

"And what if the Moonlight Rider blows up the way Challenger did, and Brad dies in flames like poor Christa McAuliffe?"

"Then he'll become as famous as her. Can you name another astronaut from the twentieth century?"

"What if this hotel blew up? What if terrorists decided to take it over? Would you still feel so smart then?"

The afflicted child grimaced at Vanessa with undisguised malevolence. Could it be that these were not entirely hypothetical questions? A number of terrorist acts had been ascribed to sufferers of Budry's syndrome, which, unlike other fatal diseases, seemed to energize rather than enervate. While they lived, its little victims tended to be overachievers, excelling at school and competing in their own Olympics. To have such energy, to know one is doomed to an early death, and to know, as well, that one's disease was caused, and then for thirty years systematically concealed, by one's own government (the actual details of the Savannah River debacle were still classified information): how could children endowed with such a heritage feel well-disposed toward the Frankenstein society that had created them?

"I try not to worry about such things," Vanessa said lightly.

"What do you worry about?"

"Whether Sean is faithful to me. Whether I'm still painting as well as I used to. How I look."

"Those are all completely selfish concerns." The little gorgon pronounced her judgment with a smirk.

"True enough. But by the same token, they're all things I can hope to control. Except for Sean, of course. Whereas if the hotel blew up – or the world, for that matter..." She waved her hand to signify such a colossal evanescence. "In that connection I once heard a wonderful story about the poet Robert Frost. It seems that when he was very very old, almost ninety, he appeared at some sort of symposium at Columbia on the day after President Kennedy made his TV speech threatening to unloose our atom bombs if Russia didn't take their missiles out of Cuba. That was probably the nearest the world had yet come to atomic Armageddon, and all of Frost's colleagues were in a tizzy, worrying about it, but Frost was actually in high spirits and said, quite candidly, that he was delighted at the prospect of not expiring all by himself of mere old age (as he was to do shortly thereafter) but instead to be going down in a general conflagration taking the whole world with him."

Gretchen scowled. "What's your point?"

"A good story doesn't point in any single direction; it's more like a compass rose. One point of this story might be that the very old are essentially untrustworthy. But then so are the young. It was Kennedy, after all, who went to the brink. The story also points to the nihilism of artists, the fact that we're on such good speaking terms with death."

"I'm the one who's going to die, probably before Christmas. Me, and thousands of other kids with the same awful disease which we got because of the Government nukular weapon plant at Savannah River and the company running it —"

"Don't," Vanessa interrupted, "mention any particular corporation by name if you want this to be broadcast someday. They'll do everything in their power to keep you off the air. Some of them, I understand, even send out hit men."

"Really?"

"None of them have ever been caught, so one can only speculate. But I wouldn't put it past them. Especially in the South. Look at the tobacco companies."

"Have you ever been in a hostage situation?" Gretchen asked.

Vanessa bounced the question back: "Why do you ask?"

"I heard once on a talk show that when hostages and their captors spend a long time together they end up liking each other. When you'd think they'd feel just the opposite."

"That's true of other situations, too. Marriage, for instance."

Gretchen's eyes lit up. Her camera trembled. "What is it like to be married to a superstar like Sean? Is he the same in real life as on TV?"

"No one is ever the same in real life. We're all duller without a good script. But Sean does go through some extraordinary mood changes."

"Is that because of drugs?"

"That's another interviewing no-no, Gretchen. Never ask about people's pharmaceutical preferences. The people who do use drugs will have to be hypocrites, and they'll resent it, and the people who don't will think that they're being made to look like hypocrites. It's a no-win situation. In any case, I can tell you confidentially that Sean has never taken drugs. He gets high on life." She rounded off her sanctimony with the smile she'd used to bring a hundred interviews to an end, a smile that said, "So long and up yours."

But Gretchen hung on. "Thank you, I'll keep that in mind. Let me ask you this: what's Sean like when he's making love?"

"Like a spring thaw. Like Adam's first taste of a mango in Eden. Like an ounce of Revlon's Musk Ox. Like Beethoven's Ninth. Like Freud's Vienna."

"He sounds pretty special. How does he compare with your other two husbands?"

"There were three besides Sean, darling, and he compares quite favourably."

"Could you be more specific?"

"Well, David was my first husband, and he's here tonight, so you can make the comparison yourself. Then there was Alonso, who was the cuatro virtuoso. The cuatro is a kind of guitar with ten strings. It comes from Puerto Rico."

"Doesn't *cuatro* mean four in Spanish?"

"That was the first question I put to Alonso. He could never explain. There was so much we never understood about each other. He didn't speak English, and I didn't speak Spanish. All we had was our love."

"How long were you married?"

"Four days. And then there was Len."

Before Vanessa could say anything about her fourteen-year marriage to the Czechoslovak pop psychologist Bohuslav Len, all the lights in the ballroom went out. Everyone fell silent and turned toward one of the screens on which the launch was to be shown. But the screens remained blank.

"Mrs O'Day!" Gretchen Spandau hissed, tugging for attention on the sleeve of her burnoose. "Bend down, so I can whisper something." Vanessa stooped, and Gretchen whispered: "You'd better go to your room. Right now. I can't tell you more than that, but it would be the best thing you could do."

With a faith that didn't need to reason why, Vanessa believed her. With a grateful squeeze and a murmur of thanks, Vanessa headed towards the red EXIT light. Her progress was marked by a series of polite bumps and collisions with the other guests. It was a little like trying to find a seat in a dark movie theatre before one's eyes have been able to adjust.

In the corridor outside the ballroom the emergency lighting system had kicked in to provide a faint expressionist red glow, enough to steer by. Vanessa had got to the stairwell and descended three half-flights when she heard the first muted cymbal-crash of the disaster she'd so providentially escaped. The stairway shuddered underfoot like an elevator that's come to a too-sudden stop.

Vanessa lifted the skirts of her burnoose and ran down the last half-flight of steps and along the corridor to the door of her stateroom. As she slid her roomcard in the slot there was a second, scarier crash and shudder. The door sprang open and she was inside and had slid the deadbolt in place just as the third charge detonated and the gigantic block of ice in which the Chateaubriand was embedded sundered. The larger chunk keeled over in one direction, and the block encasing the hotel slowly found its own new centre of gravity.

4.

Rotated some one hundred thirty degrees and viewed by the light of her own laptop, the stateroom had become a Matta painting, all dizzy perspectives and glints lost in the gloom. The door to the corridor was now on the ceiling, altogether out of reach; the door to the bathroom had become a trapdoor in the wall that served now as a floor. Fortunately most of the furniture had been bolted in place as it might have been in the cheapest motel. Only the mattress had been free to follow the law of gravity and so wound up at the new bottom of the room along with Vanessa, assorted items of luggage, and a basket of fruit. The receiver of the room's telephone swung pendulum-like above her, making little beeping sounds, asking to be returned to its cradle. If she were to clamber up onto the frame of the bathroom door, she could have reached the receiver but the dial of the phone would have remained out of reach.

She was not, however, severed from the global

communications network, for her own laptop still functioned – partially – despite the tumble it had taken. Its screen had been injured so that it served only to illuminate the stateroom, but its audio component still worked, and through it Vanessa had got in touch first with a Russian fishing complex working near the site of the disaster, and through them with NBC, and through NBC with the jail where Sean was waiting to make bail. At first the jailer had refused to let Sean come out to the NBC mobile unit or to let a cameraman in to see Sean. He pretended to believe it was all a publicity stunt.

Vanessa refused just as adamantly to relate her story to anyone but Sean, and for a few hours there was a stand-off, during which time the anchors at NBC filled Vanessa in on what they knew about the disaster. It seems that Vanessa's interviewer, little Gretchen Spandau, had been one of the leaders of Youth for Truth, a group of pre-teen terrorists who wanted their leader, Tawana X, a prominent UFO abductee in days of yore, to be given her own prime-time TV talk show on a major network, nothing more and nothing less. They were also concerned, according to the tape that Gretchen had left behind, with the problems facing dyslexic children (especially those suffering from Budry's syndrome), with the reform of the postal service, and with double-gilt inflation. Previously they'd been responsible for unsuccessful attempts to bomb the Helmsley Memorial and an Iowa City casino. The FBI had elevated three of the Youth for Truth leaders to positions on its Ten Most Wanted List, a step that had acted (according to Gretchen) more as a spur to recruitment than a disincentive.

It seemed a poor cause to be dying for, but which of the other current terrorist banners were of greater appeal? Punjab independence? Replanting the rain forests? A nuclear-free New Hampshire? At this point in history all causes seemed to be lost causes. Reasonable people understood this and went about their own business, waiting for their own particular collision with Nemesis, the *Zeitgeist*, Eco-Doomsday, what have you. Meanwhile they tried to enjoy what there was on TV, as reasonable people have done time out of mind.

At last she was put through to Sean, and they had a few minutes of unrehearsed and undeniable heart-break. Sean would offer some forlorn hope and Vanessa, stoically, would scuttle it. Rescue was not to be thought of. The Chateaubriand's landing strip and all its entrances were now under water, accessible only to frogmen. Everyone else in the hotel seemed to have been killed in the explosion; at least, there had been no radio contact established with other survivors. However, the hotel's self-monitoring maintenance system still functioned, and the data it supplied could not have been more dire. Only the three lowest floors of the hotel (now the three uppermost) still remained unflooded. All the public rooms were submerged or, like the grand ballroom, had been ripped open along the fracture line created by the blast. A great many of the celebrities who had been in the ballroom had been implanted with tracer devices as a safeguard against being kidnapped, and all these devices were now sending flatline readings.

"So it's just like the end of *Moby Dick*: And I only am escaped alone to tell the tale. Which in a funny



I think I owe to you."

"Why me?" Sean asked.

"Because Gretchen Spandau was a Sean O'Day fan. She was very disappointed to know you hadn't come here with me. I think she'd counted on dying with you. Teenage terrorists are all romantics at heart."

"I wish I were there with you," Sean said, with a touching operatic throb of grief. "If you drown, I want to drown with you!"

"That's sweet of you to say, darling, but it's a silly wish. From a strictly actuarial point of view I was always likely to predecease you. In any case, don't assume I'm to drown. I'd much rather suffocate, like Aida. I imagine consciousness just fades away as you suffocate. Even starvation would be better than drowning, though I do have a basket of fruit in the room."

"How can you be so calm about dying?"

"It must be from knowing that everything we say to each other in these last moments will be aired in prime time. Publicity-wise, one could scarcely ask for a better death. It would be a shame to spoil everything by whining or becoming hysterical."

Sean didn't miss a beat: "You should rage! Rage against the dying of the light!"

"It's true, there's no telling how long the batteries will hold out in this laptop. When they're dead, I will be in the dark. Time enough to panic then. Meanwhile, darling, I want to give you and Daphne my blessing. Marry her, have children, name the first girl after me."

"Daphne wants to hold off on having kids for a while yet."

"Then alternatively you might hire a donor and fertilize one of my ova. I've got five on deposit in Omaha. On the other hand, the Republicans may be right. Maybe we should just gobble up what's left of our civilization and to hell with the future. My art can be my contribution to posterity, if any. Forget the eggs."

There was a long silence textured with the faint snuffling of Sean's muffled, macho sobs. She considered pointing out the merits of the present situation as against their all too likely divorce in the alternate universe in which Youth for Truth hadn't bombed the Chateaubriand. This way Sean would know grief, that way guilt. Surely, grief was better for anyone's spiritual metabolism, as bran is for the bowels. But it wouldn't do to point that out. Indeed, there was not much left to say except the obvious: "I love you," and "Goodbye."

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Thomas M. Disch, born in 1940, is one of American science fiction's most distinguished authors. He is also known as a poet. His last piece of fiction to appear in *Interzone* was "Hard Work" (issue 17) and we ran an interview with him in our number 24. Lately, he has been writing plays (including a much-praised adaptation of Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*!) and opera libretti, among many other things.

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The Big Sellers, 5: L. Ron Hubbard

by Lee Montgomerie

No introduction should be necessary. Lafayette Ron Hubbard was one of the most acclaimed and widely-read authors of all time, it says on the "fact sheet" which accompanies *Mission Earth*, totting up his output at a staggering 83,481,715 words (approx) in print and 60,541,552 words published. Don't ask how 23 million words got into print without being published: it is enough to know that this superman must have written the equivalent of a full-length novel every eleven days throughout a career lasting half a century – sufficient, at the type size and paper quality of *Mission Earth*, to fill about 150 feet of shelving – an unbelievable achievement even for a person not simultaneously engaged as an explorer, war hero, mental health supremo and messiah. But any facts put out by Hubbard's promoters are obfuscated by the author's lifelong campaign of self-aggrandizement, and any figures can safely be divided by ten if not 100.

Hubbard rewrote his own life as a pulpoid adventure novel, inventing and embroidering the biography that appears in the back of each volume. A rugged boyhood spent roaming an impressive mid-Western backdrop of mountains, cowboys and Indians, hundreds of thousands of miles of solo teenage travels in the South Seas and Orient, seafaring, barnstorming college days and a meteoric writing career, drawing on his astonishing stock of experiences to turn out reams of stories for the flourishing magazine market. "Hubbard was urged to try his hand at science fiction. The red-headed author protested that he didn't write about 'machines and machinery' but that he wrote about people. 'That's just what we want,' he was told." The rest is history.

L Ron Hubbard had his day as a science-fiction writer for John W. Campbell Jr's magazines in the 1930s and 40s. Three or four stories of the scores written and hundreds claimed are still remembered: *Fear*, *Final Blackout*, which featured a dictator/messiah arising from the ruins of a future war, and *Return to Tomorrow*, which began with an aristocrat-hero

shanghaied aboard a relativistic trading ship and ended by championing genocide on a Galactic scale. Others are thankfully forgotten.

In the late 1940s Hubbard got carried away by a combination of ego, imagination and wish-fulfilment, and founded the modern science of mental health which later became the Church of Scientology. What began as a DIY technique for relieving neurotic symptoms by recovering repressed memories ("engrams" to Dianetic initiates) was represented as a tool to unlock latent powers of telepathy, total recall, vastly enhanced intelligence and a physiological potential to heal all ills. When the results were not as astonishing as anticipated, the engrams to be eradicated were pushed back into foetal life and then into previous incarnations all down the evolutionary chain. An equivalent of the soul: the Thetan – a member of a race of immortal superbeings who had created the Universe but had become ensnared in the game of life and forgotten their origins – was discovered, and a religion was born.

This scenario for a mediocre sf story – he was just an ordinary human being, but he ALONE knew that inside each and every one of us an age-old ALL-POWERFUL alien amnesiac awaited its awakening! – became a belief system that ensnared a few million adherents, attracted massive controversy (and vindictive counter-attacks against an alleged conspiracy of taxmen, government agents and psychiatrists) made L. Ron Hubbard a millionaire, household name, self-styled admiral of his own fleet and leader of a ruthlessly expansive world-wide organization.

Hubbard wrote nothing but Dianetic manuals and Scientological tracts (including "factual" accounts of his journeys to other galaxies and visits to Heaven) until his Golden Anniversary as a writer in 1982 when he was suddenly resurrected as a born-again sf writer with the bulging blockbusting *Battlefield Earth* (the 800-page saga of a young man's single-handed destruction of a race of evil alien invaders corrupted by psychiatrists) and then the

whopping *Mission Earth* for which the term dekalogy ("*DEKALOGY: A group of 10 volumes") had, its publishers say, to be specially coined "just to describe its breadth and scope" (and the fact that it occupies ten volumes).

And they are ten fat volumes at that. Ten tall, corpulent, boastful, over-dressed books; ostentatious jackets sporting portentous titles. Big glossy backslashes hogging shelf space, garish covers hustling for customers. "EVERY VOLUME A SENSATIONAL INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER!" they scream, "OVER TWO MILLION COPIES SOLD WORLDWIDE!" The reviews and blurbs are as overwhelming as the artwork. Quote from the publishers: "...distinctive pace, artistry and humour...written with that unique Hubbard hallmark..." Review quote on the same jacket: "...told with a distinctive pace, artistry and humour that is the author's inimitable hallmark" (couldn't face reading the book, I guess).

This is obviously a major publishing event: the second coming of a Grand Master of the Golden Age. Hubbard, his masterwork completed, had "departed his body" (old Scientologists never die) in 1986 after years in seclusion, lying low on the high seas or fenced in on a ranch in California, and this crowning achievement was published posthumously, heralded by a huge advertising campaign which continues to this day. Had Hubbard actually finished it before his Thetan packed its bags? Certainly the 2½ volumes ascribed to the character Monte Penwell are largely dedicated to knitting up the tangle of loose ends which are thrown off at every twist of the repetitive plot, and to bringing the whole thing to a thoroughly unsatisfactory conclusion.

Nevertheless, here it is, complete and entirely attributed to Hubbard. It is a decidedly unexpected swansong for the aged guru of Scientology after years of issuing jargon-ridden pontifications to his acolytes. Despite the dark titles and Orwellian comparisons, there is nothing serious in its style, content or purpose. On the contrary, this monumental set of heavy

Mission Earth is the authorized biography of Jettero Heller, the Duke of Manco. No, it's the true confession of paranoid Heller-hunter Soltan Gris. No, it's a desperate bid by failed poet and publisher's nephew Monte Penwell to succeed as a writer and thereby avoid marrying the Lady Corsa. It comes with disclaimers from Voltarian Censor Lord Inway ("EARTH DOES NOT EXIST!"), anti-disclaimers from 54 Charlee Nine, the Robotbrain in the Translataphone, and a ponderous introduction from L. Ron himself identifying *Mission Earth* as satire, tracing its antecedents back to Horace and Juvenal, insinuating in a bloated puff for the author that Campbell was ordered to buy Hubbard stories and nowhere mentioning that Hubbard hadn't written sf for decades.

Scenes of action are signalled by extremely short paragraphs.

I am going to give away the plot at this point, but even reduced to a few hundred words it is unutterably banal, inane and inconsequential; a Tom & Jerry storyboard without the animated accompaniment. Two indestructible adversaries from the planet Voltar battle it out, using an ever-more-fiendishly complicated series of plots and counterplots, weapons and counterweapons. Judging from the statement at the end of each volume that *Mission Earth* is written from the viewpoint of "the aliens that already walk amongst us," I conclude that these extraterrestrial cartoon characters really are stalking this planet, and I worry about the real identity of the narrator-cum-baddie Soltan Gris — a self-justifying, blustering, conniving swindler who spends much of the action dashing around the world on boats desperately fleeing officialdom, creditors and women on the rampage.

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The Earth portrayed in *Mission Earth* is the satirical vision of a paranoid recluse with an arsenal of axes to grind, or unexpunged engrams to unleash. The whole show is run by ruthless oil capitalist Delbert John Rockecenter with assistance from a huge supporting cast of co-conspirators: admen who slander their clients, news media whose "primary purpose . . . is to make men go mad," psychiatrists so awful that they cannot be portrayed directly but only by their appalling influence on their victims. Even at one remove, psychiatrists (and their minions, psychologists) are terrifying apart from perverting every character they encounter, they fry brains with massive electric shocks, scramble them with icepicks thrust through eyeballs, and kill and disembowel pregnant women before admiring professional audiences for sheer sadistic delight. Add to these the mass of ordinary people as represented by drug addicts, gangsters, swindlers and sexual deviants and you have a picture of the world that wouldn't be instantly recognizable to anybody who hasn't spent the last twenty years on a yacht compounding paranoia with selective prejudice.

retreating in defeat from every contest
bruised, broke, bilious and bitter.

Not that there is any erotic entertainment in any of this. It isn't so much the maintenance of Whitehouse-pure prudishness by contrivances such as 54 Charlee Nine who encodes every off-colour word as a (bleep) – "(bleep)-ard!", "(bleep)ed son of a (bleep)ch!" – (which didn't prevent Hubbard inventing a pair of women called Cun and Twa), or arranging for Heller's internal surveillance system to go on the blink at all strategic moments. It's that Hubbard, who must have experienced sex at some time in his life, can't describe it any more realistically than he can describe physics or psychiatry and is so squeamish that he objectifies his subjects to the point of disembodiment. A sexual encounter is reduced to a series of (bleep)s, bizarre sound effects and the odd glimpse of a dangling limb, without so much as a personal pronoun to humanize the act. This is a typical example:

"A scream!
The panting in rhythm.
Moans in rhythm.
WHOOSH!
The sheet flew up.
A shuddering cry!
Total limpness..."

In the end (and here I'm not giving much away which was not explicit at the beginning of the first volume)



Photo by Ian Sanderson of some early Hubbard paperbacks

Soltan Gris, back on Voltar, voluntarily commits himself to prison to escape the pursuit of hordes of marauding women armed with warrants for his arrest for assorted sex offences. Years pass. The existence of Earth has long been denied despite the fact that most of the protagonists are still alive.

Enter Monte Penwell with his terrible predicament: write the book or marry the (bleep)ch. Perhaps it is to signify Penwell's total lack of talent that the story becomes even more incoherent for the thousand or so pages that his exposition occupies; because in all other respects Penwell sounds exactly like Gris. Penwell is given Gris's confession, suppressed by the authorities, as scrap paper and sets out to unravel the remaining mysteries and complete the text. Thus does the book account for its own existence.

But there is a catch. Monte Penwell did not read the small print! This blockbuster, his desperate last-ditch attempt to succeed as a writer and thereby lose the hand of the Lady Corsa, will only be published on the non-existent planet Earth. He will never be able to collect his royalties. He'll have to marry her! Ha ha!

But this concluding joke is conclusively undermined by the fact that the world that exists at the end of *Mission*

Earth (and the one in which we should be reading this book if it is to make any sense at all) is a world totally transformed by Jettero Heller's offhanded and single-handed elimination of pollution, nuclear weapons, drugs, the oil industry, the works. Never mind his convenient and gratuitous obliteration of the Communist Bloc by accidentally dropping chunks of Saturn's rings all over the Soviet Union while attempting to remedy an environmental threat that had escaped my notice by the far more catastrophic expedient of hammering the true and magnetic poles out of misalignment. This last event is relegated to a couple of paragraphs and its only consequence in the plot is that Gris's Caucasian concubine comes out as a KGB man in drag. "I HAD BEEN MAKING LOVE TO A HOMO!" bawls Gris in a solitary coda to what is surely one of the most underdone apocalypses in the history of literature.

And that's it. I do think Hubbard could have been nicer to PR men, though – his own pack of hyping (bleep)ards have rendered a tremendous service for *Mission Earth*, which thanks to their tireless efforts has consistently garnered undeserved award nominations and bestseller listings. Hubbard's profile in the sf world has

never been higher. Glorified as a guru of the Golden Age, sponsor of new writers, contender for Hugo after Hugo – his ghostly presence haunts the field as it never did in his lifetime with a ceaseless blight of bookstalls, bumf, blow-up aliens, ballyhoo and bull-(bleep)...

There are books which achieve bestsellerdom on merit alone. There are other books which, whatever the reservations of literary critics, generate responses in readers. There are even books which are calculatedly pushed because a prolific and predictable author can be a gold-mine for publishers for decades to come. *Mission Earth* fulfils none of these criteria, and it is hard to imagine a commercial firm taking a risk on a million-word mish-mash of vanity, inanity, obscenity and insanity. Unfortunately, *Mission Earth* didn't need commercial publishers.

Hubbard is unique at least among sf writers in having left behind an organization totally dedicated to sanctifying his memory, and a captive audience of followers to be continually pressurized. The Church of Scientology still has a large membership, a strong grip on its members, a relentlessly energetic marketing arm and ever-rolling funds to

Concluded on page 43

One-Way to Wap Wap

Neil Ferguson

Julia Raxell, Professor of Human Psychology at the Sherman Fairchild Center for the Life Sciences, Harlem, was called away from an important Briefing Session in the Oval Office to take a call from her attorney, Marcus Senior of the law firm Marcus and Marcus. It was an awkward moment. Her specialist expertise was about to be required. The Professor had been invited to attend the Briefing in her capacity as advisor to Secretary of State Serge Ashkanasi, to whom she was on loan from the Institute and – when she was not on loan – the Secretary's current preferred sleeping partner.

"It's for you, Julia," the President said.

With his famous wry grin he held the handset for her to take, generously overlooking the clear breach of etiquette.

Julia – her canary yellow silk blouse open at the neck – flushed. Receiving a private outside call was plain unprofessional. Fortunately, the Briefing had not quite gotten under way. Navy Secretary Rikov and State Security Chief Greg Gregori had yet to arrive. Taking advantage of the lull before the brainstorm, the President returned to the window. With his back to the room, he continued to watch the snowflakes fall onto the lawn below. No doubt he was wondering whether anyone had remembered to straw-mulch the roses this year, recalling what had happened last year, when nobody had.

Secretary Ashkanasi, similarly, was reclining an elbow against the big white carrera marble fireplace inside which a simulated log-fire flickered fairly convincingly. He was in conversation with General Phibbs on matters of current State Department and Pentagon Policy: Y'know, we must get together for another round one of these days, General. Sure, Serge. Whyn't you name the day! You think you can afford it? If you're so confident, let's make it a thousand a hole this time? Well – the General shook his head – I dunno. It's an expensive way to find out how bad your game is. I'll tell you right now, you want to save the dough, free of charge. The two men joshed and chuckled. The General played golf no different than how he chaired the Pentagon Foreign Strategy Committee, with a straight back. He didn't know how to bend and he hit hard. Every hole was a target to be taken out, an enemy position on an aerial reconnaissance map.

The purpose of their conversation – both men tacitly recognized – was to provide a buzz to cover the awkward position in which their colleague, Julia Raxell, had unexpectedly found herself. Talking private business into the President's telephone. In the

circumstances it was the gentlemanly thing to do. Julia, meanwhile, held the handset to her ear in silence. She glanced in Ashkanasi's direction.

"It's Marcus Senior. My attorney..." she said. "Can you believe it? Wants me to give him instructions... now!"

In the silence that followed the President continued to watch the snow-flakes. Everyone in the room knew that Julia's annulment hearing was coming up next week. This was a tough time for her. It was something they had all been through, including the President. Ashkanasi nodded. He held up three fingers behind the President's back, meaning that was all she had. Three minutes. Not a second more.

As Julia opened the door to leave the room Navy Secretary Rikov dashed into her from the other side of it. He was still wearing his uniform greatcoat on which there were dark smudges alongside the gold-lace where the snow-flakes had blotted into the blue nap of the fabric. With his dashing white peaked cap under his arm, snow on his shoes, he might have just stepped down from the bridge of a Baltic frigate. He was holding a plastic cup of coffee in one hand and he had difficulty in juggling the cup and the cap whilst at the same time holding open the door for the ash-blond thirty-three-year-old female member of the team to pass through. She took the call in the communications annex contiguous to the Oval Office.

"Kay, Professor Raxell," the House security operator informed her. "Go 'head now."

Julia let old Marcus Senior have it. "Now listen here Marcus, I'm in the middle of a meeting – with the President of the United States. You heard of him, right? What the hell you think you're doing, calling me up in the middle of my work like this..."

At his empty desk in his empty trading premises, Julia Raxell's almost-but-not-quite-yet ex-husband let his wife run on till she ran out of breath. The sound of her voice when she was sore only excruciated his feeling of vulnerability. He had never felt so vulnerable in his life. He had his back to the wall. The Raxell Communications Company, so called, was in the hands of the Public Auditor and the almost-but-not-quite-yet defunct office was stripped bare, packed up ready for auction – hardware, software, light-fittings, paper-clips – to the highest bidder, and you could bet that would not be IBM. This was probably the last occasion he would be making use of his own equipment. Probably the last occasion he would be able to even call it his own.

Lonesome, he had programmed the company's latest unsold product, ANALING – a linguistics analysis facility capable of breaking down oral language production – speech – into its constituent parts: lexis, semantic functions, register, intonation. It was a useful package if you wanted to find out to what extent two parties were actually communicating with each other or, sliding into ambiguity and misunderstanding, whether they just thought they were. Husbands and wives, for example, hardly understood each other better than air-traffic controllers and airline pilots. It perplexed John Raxell that he had been unable to persuade any individual or agency to see the usefulness of such a system – let alone purchase one. People wanted to misinterpret each other.

He watched Julia's tirade appear on the display unit in front of him almost as soon as the words came out.

"Listen here / Marcus..."

On the screen the analysis ghosted the transcript:

(function) **IMPERATIVE**
 (register) **INFORMAL**
 (use) **SUBORDINATES & CHILDREN**
 (intonation) **RISE-FALL**
 (omission of honorific in greeting formula) **INFORMAL: SOME MALE ACCEPTABILITY**

"I'm in the middle / of a meeting with the President of the United States // You heard of him, right?..."

(function) **INFORMATION ORIENTATION**
 (statement false?) **HYPERBOLE**
 (use) **JOCULAR EFFECT.**
 (statement true?) **CONTEXT FALL-RISE**
INTONATION: SARCASM

John Raxell watched the shadowy reflection of himself overlaying the refractive surface of the VDU and the analysis of his wife's utterances. Since Julia was mistaken about whom she was speaking with, the computer found itself unable to gauge her register. The moment she paused for breath he spoke, as softly as he had ever spoken to her in all their years together.

"Honey...? / ..."

(social function) **VOCATIVE**
 (distinctive use) **DOMESTIC INTIMACY**
 (acceptability) **UNCERTAIN**

There followed a pause which was measured on the screen in units of appropriacy from **INTERRUPTION TO COMMUNICATION FAILURE**.

Finally Julia said: "John / ...?" Her voice falling and rising as if she was inside a darkened room, unsure who, if anyone, was inside it with her. Raxell shut his eyes and hoped.

"...Is that you, John...?"

"Sure it's me. Who did you think it was? Marcus Senior?"

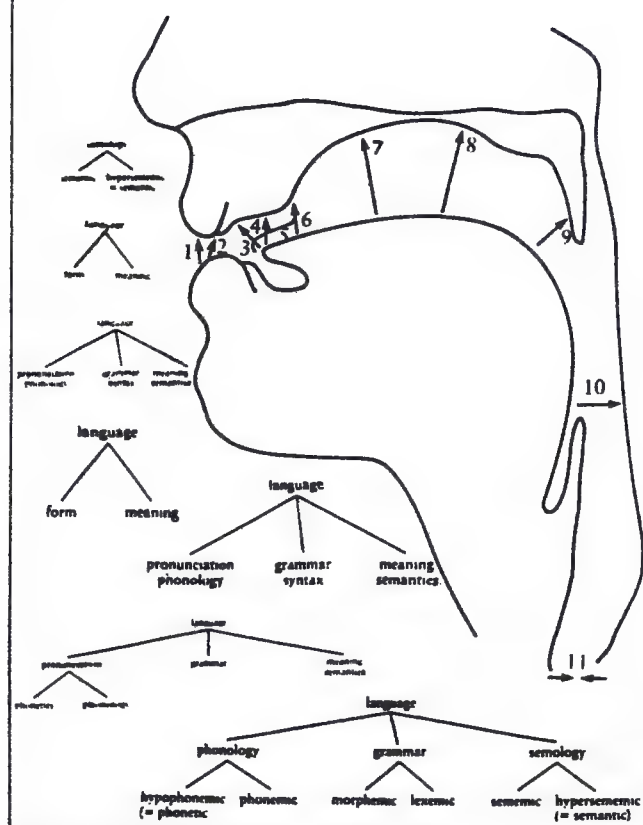
"You bastard! Who do you think you are?"

"Your husband?"

"Not for long! Mind telling me how you got in here? You can't invade my privacy like this and expect..."

"Listen, Hon. So long's you need access to a mainframe I can reach you. You're going to have to get used to the idea. Like it or not, wherever you go in the world, you'll be talking to me. I'm in your baggage. So long's you want to interface with the world to which you are accustomed – travel, communicate, earn money, buy commodities, teach school – I'll be

PLACE OF ARTICULATION



Illustrations by Tina Horner

able to reach you."

"But John, why – when we are no longer living together as man and wife – would you want to do that?"

Raxell groaned.

"Oh, Honey! You think it has anything to do with me? I can't help it if my computer has gotten used to your computer. Hardly surprising, when you consider how long they've been together, programmed to maintain two distinct but interdependent identities. Twelve years seven months, to be exact. That's a long time in the life of a computer. They speak the same language. They share each other's innermost secrets. OK, so we're not compatible anymore – but they still are. I can't help it if your passwords and codes are still integrated into the Read-Only Memory of my database, literally burnt into the microtechnology of its circuitry. It's going to take me a while to excise every reference to you, Hon. And that's my database. I can't wipe yours. I'm not in a position where I can do that. You'll have to do that yourself." He added: "Or find someone else who can do it for you."

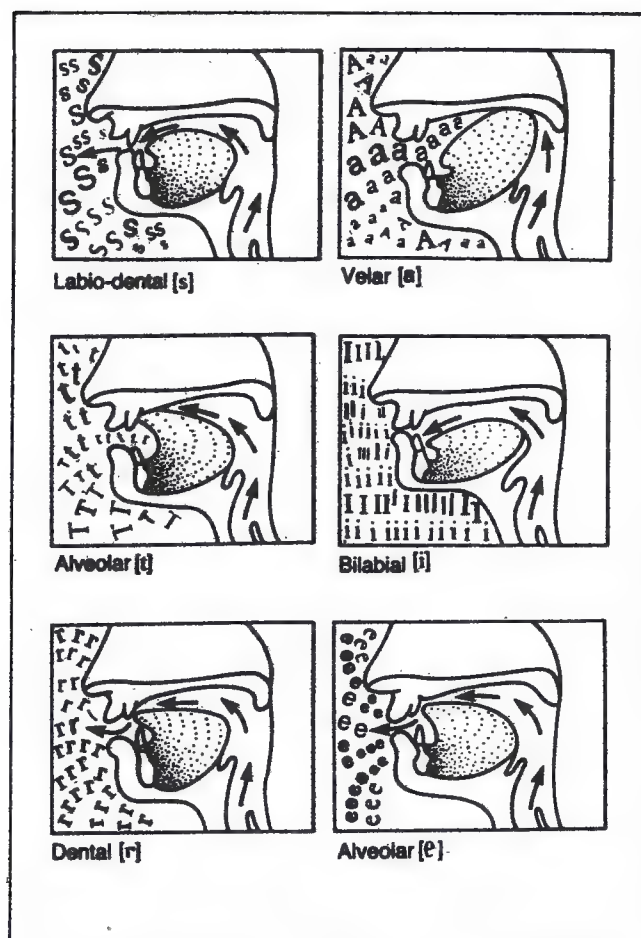
"Hold on a minute there, will you?" Julia said. "You'll be telling me next they could have a baby."

"No. They could never do that," Raxell said. "But we could have!"

Julia Raxell exhaled air through her mouth.

"It's too late in the day, John, for this conversation," she said, not unkindly.

"Sure, Honey. I didn't call you up to put the bite on you. I just wanted to let you know I hand over the keys of RCC this afternoon. Marcus Senior'll have your half of the cheque for you, soon as the bank clears



it."

"John, I'm sorry /...I never meant this to..."

(function) APOLOGY

(intonation) RISE-FALL: APPROPRIATE

"Forget it, Hon. / Business was bad, anyway. Anyway, / I hear you're going on a trip. Good luck where you're going. // Say, / where are you going?"

"I'm not permitted to tell you."

(function) REFUSING PERMISSION

(register) FORMAL

"Unfortunately, Julia, you can't keep the information from me. See you at the hearing."

Raxell hit the EXIT key.

As if it were that simple.

Out of respect for Julia, the President delayed opening the Briefing until she had slipped back into the room and taken her place at the oval table between Vic Rikov and Greg Gregori in front of her Coca Cola Company beaker and presentation Briefing pack. She was wearing heels, which might have helped. She attempted an apology which everyone pretended they had not heard. They knew what she must be going through. Besides, although her position was the least senior among those present it was not, at this moment, the least crucial. All the President's training and experience had been inside corporate advertising organizations and, he claimed, he was unable to work on a project with the continuous throughput of the psychological consequences of any course of action. It was his professional instinct.

"Okay, Vic," the President murmured. "Kick off."

Admiral Rikov – while melted snow rilled from the

polished peak of his cap onto the polished cherry-wood table – outlined the agenda. The President's party would rendezvous with the carrier *USS Iowa* at an unspecified point in the North Eastern Micronesian section of the Pacific – ETA 1900 hours local time tomorrow – and from there would proceed under cover of darkness to the secure base-camp established on the southernmost landmass of the double atoll of Bikini. The Adversaries – as Rikov quaintly called the representatives of the 3-CA – would probably be already installed on the northern landmass. The Summit would commence on the isthmus equidistant between the two peaks of the atoll soon after the breakfast photocall the following day.

The President, his eyes shut, nodded.

This, Greg Gregori said, was a real great place to throw a summit, whoever had thought of it. For a start, Bikini was a long way from any other place and it would not be a difficult task keeping media terrorists out. "Except the ones we are going to speak with, of course!" (Laughter.) "On top of that, it falls close to the Japanese Theatre. The only major power not aligned to the Three-Continents Alliance," he said. Just about the only people we could call our friends these days. By the way, who had thought of it?

Ashkanasi shook his head.

"Don't look at me," he said. "I can't rob Julia of the credit this time!"

Laughter.

The assembled company fractionally rotated their chairs to face her, waiting on her to speak.

"I have to confess, Gentlemen," she started with what she hoped was a self-deprecating smile, "that the security suitability of this location was not uppermost in my mind when I floated this project. In fact..." She paused. "It wasn't in my mind at all."

Laughter.

"Bikini is no longer associated in the public's imagination with the site of the early nuclear tests carried out in the nineteen-fifties – although we can do some work on that – but, of course, with the female split bathing garment named by the French couturier who invented it around that time. These days it's the other way about: the shape of the atoll on the map immediately suggests the top half of a bikini, if not..."

With angled thumbs Julia's hands framed the relevant section of her own anatomy to illustrate her point.

"A pair of women's breasts."

The members of the President's Summit Strategy Advisory Group, studied the twin peaks on the front of Julia's neat open-necked canary-yellow silk blouse, no different than if it had been a contoured briefing map.

"Our camp will," Julia continued, "be here. Their camp – here. And we meet – here..."

She had their attention, no doubt about that.

"The exploitation of this image will have a positive effect on the public's perception of the Summit, bringing together as it does – not too far below the level of consciousness – the two things most people are most concerned about: Sex and Death. Whatever happens – I mean, whatever the outcome of the Summit – we are not going to come out losers."

"If I understand what you're saying, by surrounding it in an aura of sexuality we can take on the Soaps and beat 'em?" the President said, getting down to it. "Right?"

Julia shrugged.

"I wouldn't want to overstate my case, Mr President. But, well... Yes. It will help our stand and have a knock-on effect in the public's imagination. The Administration can only benefit."

"Our stand, I take it, hasn't changed any," General Phibbs growled. As the Pentagon representative at the meeting it was his duty to safeguard the Coca Cola Company's slice of the international movie theme merchandise and distribution industry. Besides being one of the most effective weapons in his armoury, the Company was a major sponsor of the Initiative. "... Since the last round of talks?"

There was a general shaking of heads. Unanimity. No question. For economic, political, even historic reasons, an International Agreement to limit satellite video and TV access was not in the US interest. Never had been. Nossir. The Cultural Export Limitations Summit was a tiresome ritual, something every Administration had to live with. The trick was to get from it some spin-off advantage, to strike a posture that was more credible than the posture struck by the wishywashy confederacy of nation states – Muslim through Communist – that made up the Three-Continents Alliance, brought together, it looked like, by no more than their shared opposition to the US policy of upholding the individual's right to freedom of choice.

"Our official position hasn't changed none, either," Ashkanasi reminded everyone. "We sincerely expect the cultural terrorists of the 3-CA to accept a ceasefire in the electronics disinformation exchange, sure. But if they don't, we have no intention of censoring our programmes according to their criteria until they quit stirring up trouble in US spheres of influence. We have the right to sell our products where we like, the same as they have to preserve their goddamn cultural identity. To that end we are going to present a reasonable package that they can't possibly accept. Make them appear intransigent. We shall be tying in a run of episodes of *The Conways* and the *Dez Dexley Show* for the same as their fucking folk dancing documentaries – Sorry, Julia – and get them to throw up their hands and walk away from table."

The President nodded. His famous blue eyes, now open, twinkled. This was his territory. Boardroom deals. Packaging. Selling a product. Raking a competitor. At this game he was hard to beat.

"Mean everything you say," he said, quoting himself as he rose to his feet – the Briefing Session was over. "But don't ever say what you mean."

Half-undressed in the belly of Airforce One, en route towards an aleatory pair of co-ordinates in the north-eastern section of the Micronesian Ocean, Julia Raxell had a nasty turn. It was 3.28 am, Pacific Time. Naked on the bed next to her, Serge Ashkanasi, his sperm inside her, was propped up on one elbow listening in silence to the communications handset he was holding to his ear, the cord of which was stretched across her semi-disrobed body.

After a moment Ashkanasi said: "It's for you!"

He turned in the bed to look her in the eye. His face glowed white in the moonlight.

"Me...? It can't be! Who is it?"

"The Sherman Fairchild Centre for the Life Sciences."

"But they're in Harlem. Manhattan!"

And the handset was connected to the internal communications system of Airforce One.

"Here! Speak to them yourself! They know all about your trip. Even where you are!"

Ashkanasi, with a perplexed sneer, handed her the phone.

"In my fucking cabin!"

Warily she put the piece to her ear.

"Honey...?"

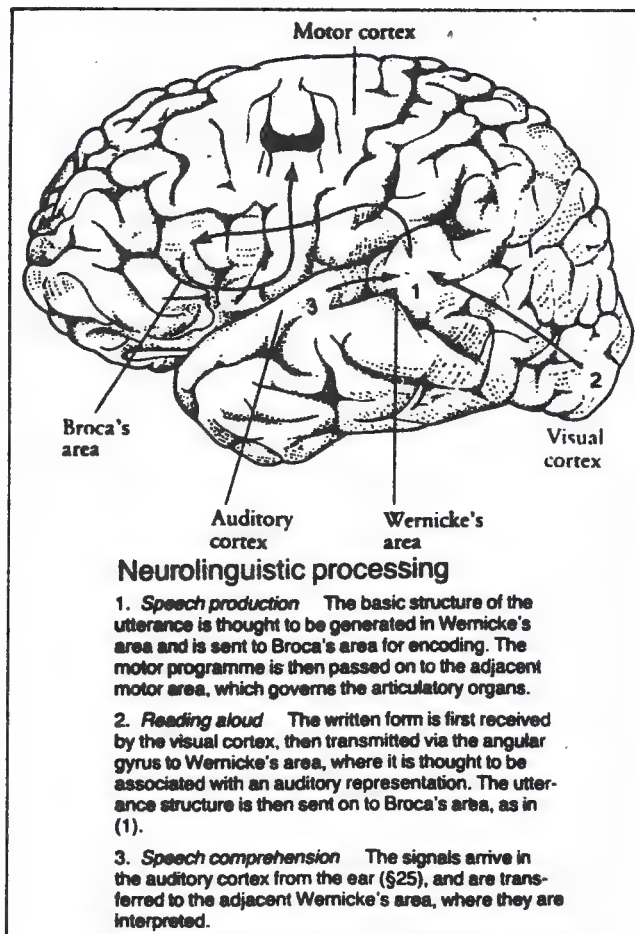
The President's airplane suddenly seemed to lose power and plunge towards the surface of the planet.

"Oh no! I don't believe this!"

"Hope I'm not butting in on anything," her husband said. "I mean, if you're in the middle of boffing Serge, I can easily call you back..."

Any second now the plane was going to hit the surface of the ocean.

Raxell lay in the semi-darkness of his hotel bedroom watching the President stepping on and off his personal airplane, waving to the TV cameras. It was a good picture, for which Raxell was grateful because he spent a lot of time in the room, recently, watching TV. He spent a lot of time there not watching it also – when he wasn't sleeping, dreaming, eating, going to the bathroom. In fact, the place was already beginning to feel like home. It already contained the apparent disorder in which he customarily kept his clothes and his computer hardware. The newspapers on the bed. The telephone under the newspapers. The easy meshing of communications systems. The half bottle of Old Times at



hand. Comfortable – he might have been living out of the room for years – he sipped his iceless whiskey while he watched the Channel Eleven pictures of the twin peaks of an island in the middle of a blue ocean – Bikini, which he had never seen before. He couldn't hear what the news reporter had to tell him about the place, however, because the TV sound was set at zero and he was wearing an audio headrig set on max.

Alongside the TV, on a second screen, words moved. The Linguistic Analysis of the conversation he was listening to.

Inert among the newspapers, the terminal of Raxell's computer lay half inside the bed next to him, the matt white of its slim plastic frame half protruding from the sheets. The terminal, like the TV and the telephone, was on line to the less wieldy data storage and processing equipment which occupied the adjoining room, connecting him to the technology which connected him to his wife. It wasn't a bad arrangement although Raxell might have liked it better if they didn't have to occupy separate rooms.

Courtesy of the signal being emitted from the uterine device inside his wife's womb – allowing him, through her computer-dependency, to plant Trojan horses inside all the computers she was dependent on – Raxell listened to the President of the Republic conferring with the man whom his wife was currently making her womb available to.

“I don't know, Serge. They're not going to like that...”

“Fuck what they like! The US has a 49% stake in most of their production and distribution companies. If they don't like it, we threaten to withdraw our capital. Bring down some governments!”

“If we do that,” the President drawled, “we going to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. We won't have a market to sell our products in. We'll, ah, how shall I put it? Go bust.”

“They need our know-how.”

“They already have our know-how.”

“They have today's know-how! We have tomorrow's! We got the brains and the economic system that can attract the brains. For as long as the brains sell themselves to who pays most, the brains will be working for us. The member states of the 3-CA are going to pay for our systems in cash. Most of it...” Ashkanasi chuckled. “Borrowed from us.”

“What happens if we ever run out of cash,” the President said, “to pay the brains?”

Raxell could hear Serge Ashkanasi consider the possibility. Like all the President's conversations this one was being recorded and stored in the Congress Archive on Independence Avenue, Arlington, in case Congress ever needed to establish his knowledge of any matter. Or the President, for his part, his ignorance.

“We enter a post-capitalist mode of production period, I guess,” Ashkanasi said, deadpan.

Both men guffawed.

“Right! They going to let us keep our equity in their companies just so long as they need the products those companies produce. It's a delicate ecological balance – between the US and the 3-CA. We need...”

“All I'm saying...”

“We need their debts and their tin-mines and a mar-

ket in which to sell our leisurewear as much as they need our cash, our tin cans and our consumer communications systems.”

“Fuck, all I'm saying is that we demand they reduce their tariffs on our software distribution! Free up their so-called cultural autonomy to some healthy competition!”

“I don't know, Serge. They're not going to like that.”

The President's party and the delegates of the 3-CA faced each other across the entrance to the old Navy laboratory that would soon serve as the Summit Treaty Room and the ballpark almost as soon, judging from the two teams lined up behind the delegations, as a ball park.

On one of the two screens in his hotel room on 32nd Street, Raxell watched a looped video recording of the news shots of the US and foreign politicians entering the Treaty Room on Bikini atoll. There was no denying that for once the 3-CA had gotten it right. The new designer-label suits worn by the US personnel looked tired alongside the ironic period elegance of the foreigners. The President didn't look too bad but he was playing opposite an Eritrean Rita Hayworth, an Aztec Monty Clift, a Nordic dead ringer for Ingrid Bergman. The poor bastard didn't stand a chance. The representatives of the world's remaining ethnographic regions were obviously got up to look like Hollywood heroes in order to make a point. With the US cameras aimed at them, why throw away the opportunity? They could hardly appear on TV dressed in their own colourful national costumes and then complain that their native identities had been vandalized by US media technology. They were elegantly demonstrating the extent to which they had been culturally colonized.

Raxell had watched the loop – slowed up and at normal speed – thirty-seven times. He especially liked the bit where the Latin American Clark Gable showed Ashkanasi, in an appalling powder-blue three-piece and tie, how to open a bottle of vintage champagne – the graceful gangster communicating with the worthless cop who would no doubt eventually shoot him. He liked the bit where Mrs Raxell found herself standing alongside the President for the photo session group shot. She was wearing her dark glasses and pale cotton belted tunic dress, short but not too short. She looked very pretty. Sexy and competent. The President could have done a lot worse. Raxell had always liked that dress.

Brushing aside the newspapers, he fished out the terminal and had his computer request the land-line access number from the Archive in Arlington and, when the number came up, had the security system on the USS Iowa put through his call.

Unattaching one half of the headset, he lifted the telephone to his ear. He waited. In one ear he could hear the Bell telephone call-tone and, in the other, the telephone in the US airbase on Bikini atoll ringing in the room in which the President was hemming and hawing with his closest advisor.

In his right ear he heard Ashkanasi say: “Are you expecting a call?”

“I don't believe so.”

In his left ear the call tone ceased.

“Hello, this is the President,” the President said into

both of Raxell's ears.

"For the Secretary of State, Mr President," he said.

"It's for you, Serge."

The President must have covered the set with his hand.

"Who is it?" Ashkanasi said.

"He knows me," Raxell said before the President had the chance to relay Ashkanasi's request. "We already spoke. Earlier in the night."

"Says you know who he is..."

The President relayed the information without pausing to consider how the exchange had been transacted.

"Raxell!" Serge Ashkanasi bellowed into the telephone. "I ever get hold of you, fuck, am I going to kill you?"

"Hear me out, Serge," Raxell said. "You're poking my wife, right? I'd like to propose a deal. You have her drop her annulment proceedings in the NY City District Court and I'll help you penetrate the 3-CA's security computer."

There followed – both over the phone and over the headset – a lengthy silence. Lengthy enough to tell Raxell what he needed to know.

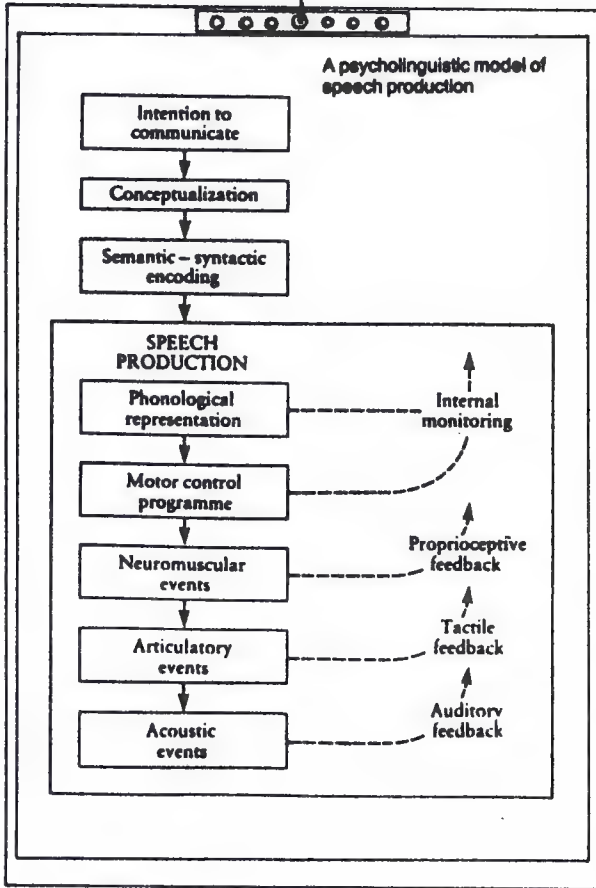
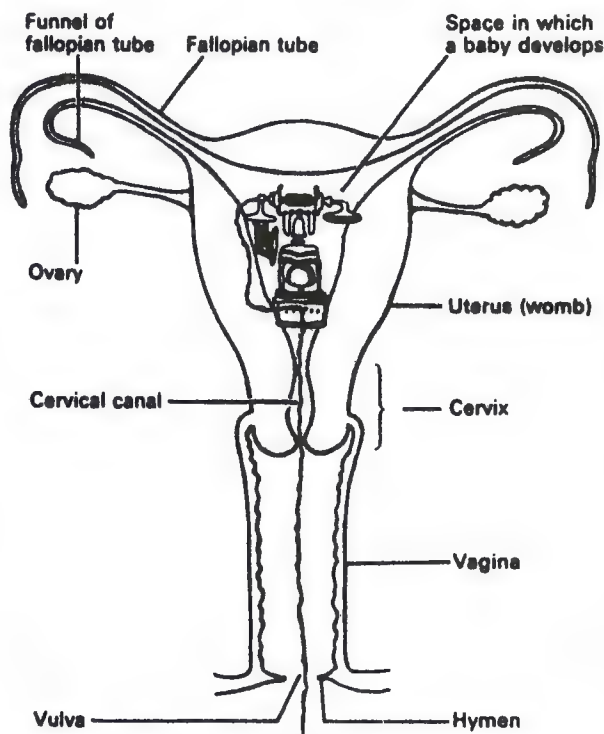
In the slow rake of the powerful self-focusing Army binoculars Julia Raxell regarded the ocean from the southernmost tip of the mutant geological formation – the left nipple as the pilot inside the hovering TV helicopter would see it. The ocean was bristling with the communications antennae and air activity of the two rival fleets. Stood off on the eastern horizon, the grey US carriers faced the gaudy rainbow flotilla belonging to the members of the 3-CA.

She lowered the binoculars a few inches.

On the faded diamond of the abandoned US Navy (Marshall Islands) sports area the final plays of a semi-serious game of softball were being enacted between teams drawn from the home fleet and the visitors. According to the improvised scoreboard the Pittsburgh Tigers – semi-jocularly so called – from the Austrian ship *Der Rosenkavalier*, were drawn against the Cleveland Redskins of the *USS Texas*. The Reds were teeing off the Tigers, just as you might have expected, although it looked as if the Tigers were beginning to rally. From the anxious face of the 3-CA pitcher as he looked over his shoulder, hoping against hope for a strike-out on three and two with the bases loaded, she closed the span of her vision to the surface of the atoll itself. On the rising terrain between the baseball diamond and where she was standing a brindled form of lichenous shrub appeared to be struggling to gain purchase among the dust and rusty Coca Cola cans. Ants the size of lizards conveyed dew-water inside used rubber prophylactics. Hybrid forms of local fauna were rallying against the conditions which had obtained in their habitat since the war declared on it by an adversary higher up the evolutionary chain than themselves.

Behind the growl of the helicopter engine a roar went up from the crowd watching the ballgame. Either the 3-CA pitcher had gotten his strike-out or the US batter his homerun. It almost drowned out the tweet tweet of the communications handset inside the breast pocket of Julia Raxell's tunic dress. Underneath the pocket her heart sank. She knew from the calltone

Fig. 1. Diagram of the female reproductive system.



frequency who was on line. Secretary of State Ashkanasi, the only person besides herself who possessed the day's oneoff confidential access number. It was the call she had been dreading. Perhaps it had been a mistake to enter into a sexual liaison with a man who was in a position to pull rank on her whenever he felt like it.

"Darling...?" she purred into the handset.

There followed a short pause.

"Ah-mm...I'm sorry, Julia..."

She recognized the voice immediately. It wasn't Serge Ashkanasi's.

"...I hope I didn't give you a shock," the President continued as if nothing were amiss. The gentleman in whose presence a lady had inadvertently broken wind. "But what I have to tell you has priority. Fact is, we're on alert here. Green, going on amber."

"What...?"

"We've been penetrated. Our security – shafted. Some nut has successfully hacked his way into the technology ringfencing Bikini. Ours and Theirs."

"Shit! That's impossible!...Oh, I'm sorry. I..."

"Don't worry, Julia. My own feelings precisely."

The Professor of Human Psychology at the Sherman Fairchild Center for the Life Sciences, Harlem, fifth-sensed that there was more to come. Why was he telling her? She had nothing to do with security. That was Greg Gregori's department.

"How do you know?"

It always paid, she had found out, when dealing with a person who was about to be diagnosed as psychotic, to challenge his epistemology first.

The President hesitated. "How do we know what?"

"That they are in."

"Simple. He told us details of our bargaining position we didn't tell anyone yet. What we have in the hole. We must presume that the hacker is in a position to pass this information over to our adversaries. Either we abandon the talks or consider..."

"But how do you know," she interrupted deftly, "that the hacker knows what the third party – in this case, the 3-CA – intends to do? It's the oldest trick in the book. The double bluff people subject to paranoid fantasies specialize in, from Iago to Hitler. Nearly everyone falls for it. I mean, did he tell you anything you didn't already know?"

"We didn't know some nut had a fucking bug up our ass," Ashkanasi growled.

Julia was momentarily at a loss to know what register would be appropriate in a situation like this.

"He knows," the President continued, "that we intend to do the opposite to what we will say we are going to do. That's good enough for me."

"With respect..." It was her duty to tell him. "Everyone in the world knows that."

"I mean exactly what we intend to do. Things only Serge and I ever discussed. Not what you and Rikov think we are going to do."

"How could the hacker know that? We use the one-off Turing system in all our communications. It hasn't been cracked since it was invented. Around 1943, I believe."

"Right! How could he? Fact is, he didn't need to crack anything. He has put together some wacky software that can tell what a person is thinking from what he says."

"Or she," she muttered to herself.

"It can decipher language. It takes all the linguistic factors into account. The words. Grammar. Intonation. Stuff you don't even realize when you're speaking. It's a wonder anyone ever opens their mouth! So he didn't need to crack our Turing codes. He could work it out just from listening in on a conversation. Two people speaking over a telephone. On TV. Any public utterance."

"Oh no...!"

The distant roar of the softball crowd broke over the ocean like an ocean dragging against a pebbled shore.

"...Raxell!"

She listened to the President nodding over the communications channel.

"Why no-one thought of it before I don't understand."

"I see."

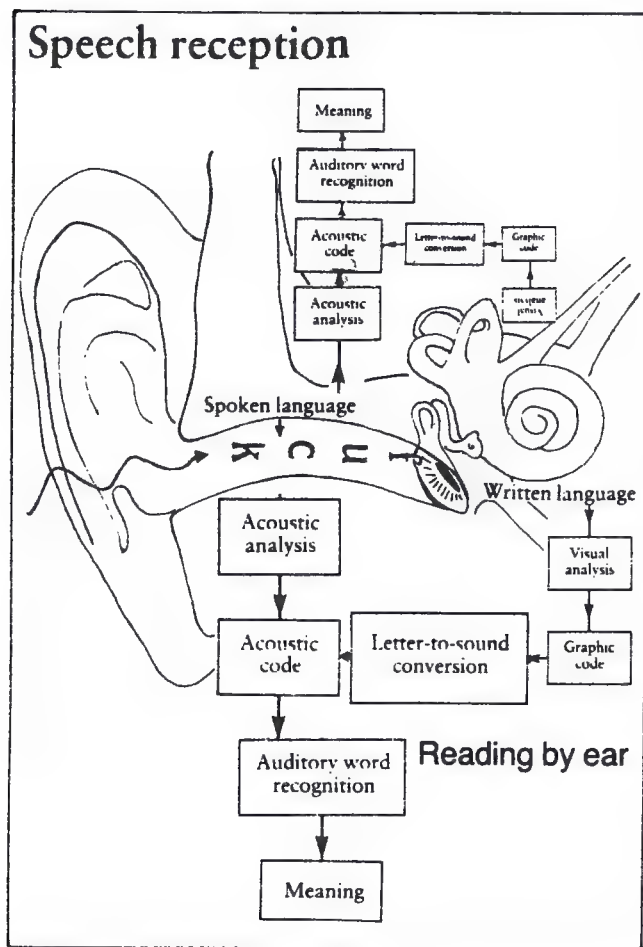
"I thought you would. Now you appreciate why we're on alert here."

"Amber – going on red," Ashkanasi said.

"You know, he tried everywhere, to sell that system," Julia said. "He couldn't give it away. No-one was interested. No-one could see its application."

At least, that was one thing she could never be accused of. She had always believed in her husband's product. Language systems. It was her husband – author of the most comprehensive linguistics dictionary in the country – that she was not a hundred per cent certain of. His obsession with colonizing her womb. Babies. Diapers. PTA...

"Don't worry about Raxell," the President told her.



"We're buying the company that recently bought his company."

"What?"

"He's joining the team. He's probably on his way."

"Serge...? What's going on?"

Ashkanasi said nothing.

"I'm real sorry it has to be like this, Julia," the President said, sounding real sorry. "We don't have a lot of choices. Raxell's holding the gun. We have to pay what he's asking."

"Me!"

"I'm sorry."

"What about me?"

"What about you?"

"Am I fired?"

Her tears fell silently onto the magnolia plastic handset.

"No way! If you still want your job, it's yours. Seems at this stage of the negotiations we need the services of a linguistician. Just as we needed those of a psychologist to set up the negotiations in the first place. Who knows, by the time we're through, we'll need someone who can sell us a one-way ticket to Wap Wap."

"But... John and I are in the middle of divorce proceedings! You can't expect me to..."

"Plenty of time for you to cut out, if that's what you feel you need to do. We'll understand. On the other hand..."

"I stay. John and I don't appear at the District Court on Wednesday. We try and make a go of it."

"That's up to you and Raxell."

"Well, thank you, Mr President! For selling me back to my ex-husband!"

"On red," Ashkanasi said.

"Serge says we're on red, Julia. We're running late. We have to go ahead. Look, I wanted to break this to you myself. I sincerely hope you'll decide to stay with us because I value your contribution to the negotiating team. But, of course, that's your decision."

The line went dead.

Below, the ballpark was going wild. The Tigers had, miraculously, turned the game around. It was all over. Her affair. Her political career. Her role in formulating Government policy. Either she went back to wearing a white coat in Harlem, a medium-sized fish in a small pond, or she agreed to suck John Raxell's cock. Or

maybe worse – have his baby. As the President had rightly said, it was her decision.

The downdraft of the descending Navy helicopter – the engine screaming – forced her to hold down the hem of her cotton dress with both hands in order to prevent it from flying up over her pants.

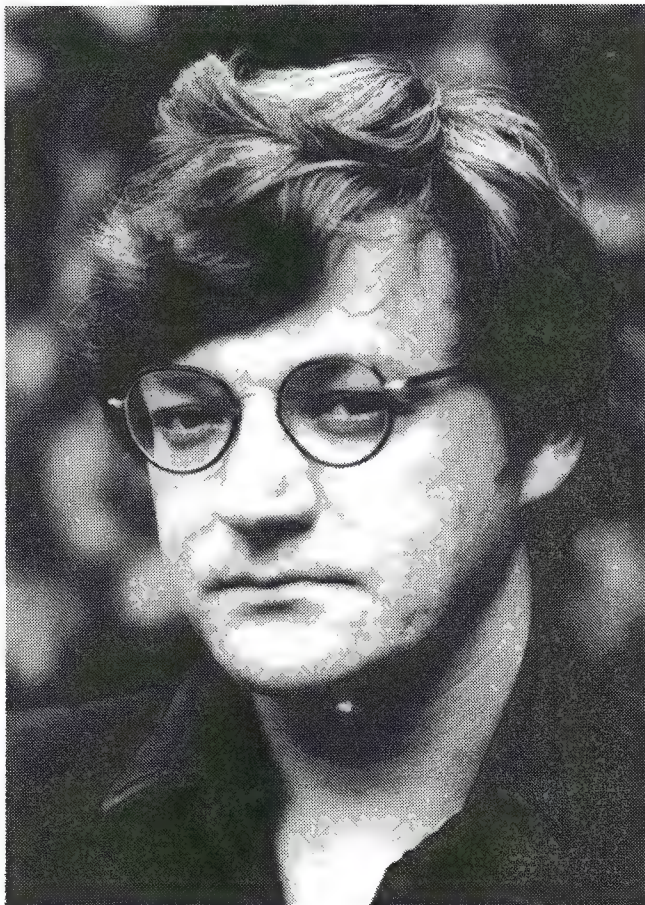


Photo of Neil Ferguson by Nina Prescod

Neil Ferguson, born in 1947, made his professional fiction debut with "The Monroe Doctrine" (*Interzone* 6). Since then he has published three books, the latest of which, a science-fiction novel called *Double-Helix Fall*, is reviewed by Paul McAuley in this issue. We are very pleased to welcome him back to these pages after too long an absence.

BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5 and 7). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: \$4 sea mail, or \$5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy *three or more* in one order may have them at £1.95 each (i.e. post free).

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Mutant Popcorn

Film reviews by Nick Lowe

Six men and a woman sit round a conference table in polarized sepia sunshine. All have bad ties, young families, and the word "creative" in their job titles. It's the *nineties*.

"Thank you, Jeff. Well, the Concepts team spotlights non-threatening paranormal encounters as the season's runaway. We have strong response on relationship pictures featuring deceased persons in positive family situations. Recommendation is we advance this formulation and nuke this one in the microwave for fifteen to twenty to see if it pings."

"Thank you, Warren. I feel that the *nineties* are going to be a more caring, relationship-centred decade, and that the market will want to feel that the other side is a place where family and environmental values can be positively sustained. I feel we should bear that in mind in our deliberations at this time."

"Thank you, Steve. Well, let's review. We have paranormal affirmation of the father relationship in *Field of Dreams* and *Ghost Dad*, posthumous romance in *Always* and a bunch of others, a cop with a ghost partner in *Heart Condition*...How about, um, *Poltergeist Baby*? – say a warming comedy about a single lady lawyer caring and coping with an invisible tyke who keeps knocking furniture about and oozing green ectoplasm."

"Too realistic, Shawna. But what about a bunch of lovable spooks stranded on the ocean floor with a nameless primordial –"

"Now, Garry, I know you've been under a lot of pressure lately. Although, maybe a deceased father who trades places with his son – or, hey, a platoon of MIA vets who return from the hereafter to help America come to terms with the memory of Nam..."

"Excuse me, Marty. I think I may have a solution here. What about a rough but lovable German shepherd who comes back from the next world to help his human partner in the apprehension of a criminal mastermind?"

"I'm so sorry, Michael. It's been done. It was called *All Dogs Go to Heaven*."

Actually, though, *All Dogs Go to Heaven* is anything but formula stuff, even if its chain of creation suggests otherwise (directed by Don Bluth, from a screenplay by David N. Weiss, from a story by ten different people, from a title by Don Bluth). But this simply reflects the structure of the strange world of Sullivan Bluth Ireland, the Dublin animation studio set up by Disney renegade Bluth to revive the golden age of lush, handcrafted feature animation progressively abandoned by Disney in the doldrum seventies.

Ten years ago, remember, nobody would have bet a gumwad on a revival of the animated feature. The consensus was that the Disney achievement was historically irreproducible: that lavish hand animation had only been economic in an age of pre-union starvation labour rates, and that even Disney's commercial success depended on an extraordinary programme of secondary merchandising and long-term returns from backlist re-releases. Besides, Disney had Walt: an inspirational genius conveniently jobsharing with a tyrannical megalomaniac. The glum product from *Robin Hood* to *The Black Cauldron* seemed to demonstrate the combination was both indispensable and unique.

And yet, of course, Disney in 1990 has turned around. The new back-to-roots Disney of the Katzenberg era has set out unashamedly to rebuild its traditional base in family pictures, both toon and live (as in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*). And at the centre is a production line of animated features aiming to deliver a new full-length feature every Christmas, all the while keeping up the traditional summer reissues and playing the back catalogue deftly on the video market. Clever farming-out of the more mindless and repetitive cel labour to the Far East has helped peg animation costs at a credible level, and the films themselves have been high-performance, if resolutely retro and dull, revamps of traditional themes: animal classics in 88's *Oliver and Company*, romantic fairytale in 89's *The Little Mermaid*.

And then, in the other corner, we

have Bluth. In contrast to the committee conservatism of current Disney policy, Don Bluth, terrifyingly, is a Walt: a hard man with unsafe ideas and both hands locked in a deathgrip on the controls. It once looked like the plughole for Bluth after 82's *The Secret of Nimh*, the technically lavish debut doomed by an erratic script and unpronounceable title. But a two-picture deal with Spielberg's Amblin brought hits with *An American Tail* and *The Land Before Time*: both astutely conceived projects, if mawkishly handled, that challenged Disney directly with classier ideas, lusher production values, and latterly a prolific and flexible independent studio base in scam-happy Eire. And they too, in the States at least, open at Christmas.

Well, this Christmas Disney got the laugh. Last round, Bluth's more contemporary tot-credible dinosaurs nipped seriously at the heels of Disney's cat'n'dog Dickens; this time the far better but precariously offwall *Dogs*, Bluth's first feature with new partners Goldcrest, was pummelled by the unexpectedly strong *Little Mermaid* (which doesn't get here till the autumn). This is a great shame, and I hope this nation's youth have better sense, because the difference between *All Dogs* and, say, *Oliver and Company* is the difference between, well, *Oliver!* with fluffy kittens and the Alsatian remake of *A Matter of Life and Death*. We have Burt Reynolds voicing Charlie, the rakish proprietor of a doggie speakeasy in thirties New Orleans, who gets packed off to doggie heaven ("All dogs go to heaven, because dogs are naturally kind and loyal") by his treacherous pit bull partner. Cheating the powers, Charlie escapes to take revenge; but gets involved with a winsome human orphan, and to his own consternation finds his hardbitten nature beginning to mend. But, alas! Charlie's misconduct above has condemned him next time he dies to canine hell. So will Charlie accept eternal damnation to save the human he loves? or will the terrestrial underworld swallow him first?

What makes this weirder is that much of the time *Dogs* carries on like

a normal family picture. The Depression setting allows direct pastiche of the classical Disney style, and the mix of doggy naturalism and preposterous anthropomorphism is superficially familiar and cosy. But the casual extension of the plot to death and beyond is a jolting departure from *101 Dalmatians*, quite apart from the uneasy savagery of the gangster theme. The vision of hell had to be cut for certification, and the ending leaves children screaming as the lights come up. Perhaps that alone explains the box-office walkover of *The Little Mermaid*, which adulterates Anderson's story with a happy ending. But much of *All Dogs Go to Heaven* is classic stuff, for all the (by now expected) lapses of script and technical overreaches. The best surprise, remarkably, is the simpering orphan, who upstages all the animals through some plain but surprisingly authentic observation of how children actually move. The other humans are desultory, and a lot of the time the matching of movement to backgrounds is uneven. But the visual texture is exquisite, the sewer-level New Orleans constantly inspired, and the strange adult themes of death and redemption darkly at home. It's hard to imagine anything like this from Disney. Give the kids an Easter treat and scar them for life.

Out on quite a different limb is the year's best junk film so far, Empire graduate Brian Yuzna's slaphappy teen paranoia flick *Society*. A conceptually downmarket *They Live*, this tongue-thru-cheek attempt to give new meaning to the alienation of youth has moments of utter brilliance, intervals of witless crap, and large stretches that indistinguishably merge the two. For this is the tale of 17-year-old Bill, school basketball champ and all-round hi-flier, who comes to suspect that *Society* is conspiring against his success. His uppercrust family seem remote, his school rivals contemptuous and exclusive, and even his shrink seems part of the league against him. Bill's doubts about society people find a focus when his best mate produces a secret tape of what really went on at Bill's sister's coming-out party. Strange things start to happen: the tape disappears, the friend dies (or does he?) in a mysterious accident, and when Bill gets to shag the school goddess her mom turns out to be this weird person... Is Bill crazy? is the world crazy? is someone out to drive him crazy? Are things what they seem to be, or is society really just a mask for something horrible beyond conceiving, an amorphous blight of nethermost confusion that bubbles and blasphemes at the centre of all being? Well, given the prominence of the credit for "Surrealistic Makeup Effects" (by the inexpensively virtuosic Screaming



From 'Society' (Medusa Pictures)

Mad George), I'll leave you to work on that one. Remember to scratch one box only.

It needs to be said *Society* is a firmly youth-oriented movie – even the screenwriters are called Woody and Ricky – and as such favours radically non-Aristotelian modes of plotting. Good scenes and *ad hoc* twists weigh more than logic or continuity, so you can have fun over your pizza afterwards totting up loose ends unresolved or unexplained by the wild finale. It doesn't matter much at the time, but before the credits are half done you're already thinking Wait a minute... On the plus side, though, the main idea is great, and so long as you don't know what's going on a lot of the set pieces are surprisingly effective. In particular, the score and many of the images are terrific: the guy who arranged the main theme (strange electronic minors and discords under a jolly chorus of the Eton Boating Song) is possibly a genius.

The main minus is the ending, which overdoes expectations without actually satisfying them; but then, movies in general tend to have a rather naff idea of ultimate horror, as though you can make a concept more evil simply by splashing on more glycerine and latex. But there are worse offenders than *Society*, and if the suggestion is better than the presentation, at least it finds tasty place for an underused nightmare. In contrast to all the crop of ghost romances, which woo us with the unappetizing thought that the next world is infiltrated by the same tacky values and relationships as this one, *Society* offers the much more intrinsically plausible suggestion that those values and relationships are just a veneer over an ancient, secret, maggotty heart of darkness. Suppose society

really is just a veil...that beneath our loved ones' surfaces lurks a nameless primordial evil, invincibly vast...the Great Old Ones...*ph'nglui mgwl'nafh*...the colour out of time...the three-lobed burning eye...it shall not find me...*ia! Shub-Niggurath*...(&c.)

(Nick Lowe)

L. Ron Hubbard

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squander on promoting L. Ron Hubbard as a genius, godling, saviour of mankind and greatest writer not just of our time but of *all* time. One hopes that the reports of megasales of his colossal deka-decker (at least to the non-Scientological public) are probably as exaggerated as all the other lies, (bleep)ed lies and statistics pertaining to Hubbard.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mission Earth consists of 10 books: *The Invaders Plan*, *Black Genesis: Fortress of Evil*, *The Enemy Within*, *An Alien Affair*, *Fortune of Fear*, *Death Quest*, *Voyage of Vengeance*, *Disaster*, *Villainy Victorious* and *The Doomed Planet*. They are published by Scientology's legally independent publishing organization, New Era. The complete series will set you back £109.50 in hardback and around £40 or so when the paperback issue is complete.

(Lee Montgomerie)

Negatives

Nicholas Royle

If night-time motorway driving didn't have such a numbing effect on the mind and the senses, he wouldn't have needed to wake himself up by accelerating down the inside lane and into trouble in the way that he did.

The queues out of London had begun thinning out near Luton and disappeared after Milton Keynes. There were still plenty of cars on the road but now they were moving at a proper speed.

He kept to a steady 70 in the inside lane, aware that it was a little too fast for the car over a long distance, and he would probably have to top up water and oil at Rothersthorpe or Watford Gap.

The road was straight; the distance to the next car in front remained constant. He'd tried listening to music but couldn't hear it over the noise of the engine. Now and again he looked over at the passenger seat and smiled at Melanie. Despite the noise and her conviction that she wouldn't, she'd managed to fall asleep.

For a brief moment he had a detached view of himself: sitting in a small chair hurtling through the darkness encased in this strange little shell called a car. It was like sitting in a chair at home and being taken somewhere. He felt as if he should be able to get up and go and make a coffee. The steering wheel and pedals seemed incidental. Then with a jolt he was back there driving the car again.

The road disappeared under the car, perfectly uniform from one bridge to the next. He opened his eyelids and wondered how long they'd been closed: a split second, or two or three seconds? He only needed to drop off for two seconds and unconsciously depress the accelerator and they'd be up the back end of the car in front. He knew he should stop but also knew he wasn't supposed to. Where would he stop if he decided to? On the hard shoulder, obviously, but where? After a mile, half a mile, a hundred yards? Its invariable aspect offered no invitation to pull in.

Instead, he shifted in the seat and straightened his back. Gently he accelerated. The car ahead was drawn into sharper focus. It was a Fiesta, a new model. He eased the pedal down further. He glanced in the mirror and saw just red lights; it must be reflecting the other carriageway; the vibration had caused it to slant; he straightened it.

He was suddenly right on top of the Fiesta.

With a tug on the steering wheel he missed the car in front and sheered into the middle lane. A horn blared, tyres screeched. There were cars behind him. He stood on the accelerator and leapt into the empty

space ahead. A large BMW passed him on the outside, faces peering his way. Ignoring them, he concentrated on eating up the middle lane. Drowsiness snatched away, like a veil from a bold, thrusting sculpture, he bent over the steering wheel. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the speedometer needle leaning round the clockface to point at numbers it had not seen before.

The needle was just tipping at 98 when the back end suddenly collapsed at one side and the car began to veer.

His immediate reaction was enormous relief that Melanie was not with him. She'd been working out west and was going up in her own car to meet him there.

Although he detested actually going to work, he was glad when they'd had to move from the old office to new premises. It had taken two months to find suitable new office space and they'd ended up having to move right out of Soho (much to Egerton's regret) as far north as the Angel.

Linden had been pleased because it meant he could now drive to work and find somewhere to park. In Soho it had been impossible.

Of course, it meant sitting in traffic jams at the bottom of Holloway Road and where Essex Road joined Upper Street, but wasn't it nicer to be stuck in your own car rather than suffocating in a tube tunnel surrounded by the barely alive, still smelling of their beds?

He crunched into first and edged forward, but the Citroen in front had only been moving into space between it and the next car: the queue itself was not moving.

He realized he'd still got the choke out a fraction. He pressed it home and the revs dropped to normal. It was still running a little low; it could easily cut out waiting in a queue like this. Still, the man at the garage who'd tuned it only last week said it was better that it should be running too low rather than too high. It would keep his fuel consumption down and that had been quite a problem before. For a twelve-year-old Mini, the man had said, it wasn't in bad nick.

In front of him in the rear-view mirror he saw someone cross behind the car. He knew he was rolling back so he brought the clutch up and stepped on the gas. Then the queue started to move.

He parked in the private carpark in the courtyard of the new complex. The start of another week. He cursed at the thought of five more days in the company of Egerton. Five more days staring at that damned

computer screen. He didn't know which he disliked the most – Egerton or the computer. That was a lie. The computer was not sentient; it had no excuse. (Come to think of it, Egerton was barely sentient either.)

Egerton was slowly climbing the stairs when Linden pushed open the ground-floor door. Not that the other man had, like Linden, just arrived – Egerton always got in at nine, an hour early – no, he'd come down to get the post so he could look at it before anyone else. That's why he was climbing the stairs so slowly, because he was devouring every bit of information the morning's delivery had to offer. Linden didn't care about the post – he wasn't in the slightest bit interested in the industry which employed him – it was just Egerton's rapacious enthusiasm for everything connected with the job that irritated him.

"Good morning, Brian. How are you today? Did you have a nice weekend?"

Please, somebody, tell me why he has to be so bloody cheerful every Monday morning, Linden thought. The weekend, ah yes, the weekend – that precious island of time when he could escape. He knew Egerton often came in on Saturdays. He didn't ask why any more.

Egerton was grinning at him, waiting for an answer. He couldn't bring himself to speak to the man.

The computer was waiting for him. He sat down, switched it on and nothing happened.

"Good morning, Brian." Whitehead had come into the room. "It's down. You'll have to use the other one. You were working on floppies, weren't you? Just stick them in the other machine."

Linden nodded. Whitehead was the boss. He pretended to be everybody's equal. Until it came to writing out the salary cheques.

He worked without a break all morning. The computer had a green screen, which he wasn't used to. His eyes were tired by the time he'd saved all he'd done and was ready to go to lunch. One good thing about Egerton's keenness was that Linden never had to worry about the man inviting himself along to lunch: Egerton generally worked right through, occasionally getting in a McDonald's or a beanburger or something else equally Egerton-like.

When Linden tried to read his paper, waiting for his food to arrive, he found he couldn't concentrate properly. There were red dots all over the page. Wherever white was enclosed by black, like a b, an o, a p or an A, the little white space was now red. Consequently, the effect on a page of small newsprint was to turn the whole page red.

He worked all afternoon on the computer. Egerton annoyed him with his exaggerated mannerisms – grasping his chin, swinging his arms, clicking his fingers. When he wasn't striding around the office he was making telephone calls, mainly to the company's debtors. It was a matter of personal betrayal if someone had lapsed with an invoice payment. When Egerton uttered the company name he did so with chest-swelling pride.

Linden looked from the screen and grimaced at the tight little curls of blonde hair on Egerton's head.

Driving home, Linden was tense. Occasionally he wavered over the red line in the middle of the road. A Triumph Vitesse barked its horn at him.

The red effect didn't wear off and allow Linden to read a book without straining his eyes until he was too tired to read anyway.

"It's the green, you see," Whitehead explained. "After looking at the green screen for long enough, you look away at something white and you see it as red. Green and red are the reverse of each other, or negatives or something. It's to do with that. Take a photo of a man in a red jumper and on the negative the jumper will be green."

Because the maintenance contract on the old computer had expired and Whitehead was too tight to get an engineer in, Linden had to work with the green screen all week. It only affects some people, Whitehead had said, but it's not dangerous and is only short term.

He knew he shouldn't sit in front of the machine for too long at any one time, but try telling that to Whitehead. They had a big job on – correction: Linden had a big job on. He was editing a 400-page handbook and it had to be done by the end of the week. Each page resembled the next; three entries on a page, all with their identical lines of superfluous information. Every decimal point had to be checked. The spelling, as usual, was abysmal.

He ran off a hard copy of all he'd done, but the pages were bright red: it dazzled him. The material should be checked by someone else before it went off, but Egerton and Whitehead could barely spell their own names.

Negotiating Highbury Corner, Linden almost killed a pedestrian.

He'd thought the old man was in his rear-view mirror, but the wrinkle-smoothing shock on the aged face when the Mini snarled forward brought Linden's foot crashing down on the brake pedal. The car juddered and stalled. Linden sank his head onto the wheel and waited for the old man and several bystanders to stop screaming at him.

As soon as he got in he went to the fridge for a long drink of cold milk. He opened the fridge door and recoiled. There were two bottles of blood on the shelf.

He washed and shaved to see if that would remove some of the tension. He looked awful in the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot.

He switched on the television, but the newsreaders' eyes were all bloodshot as well, and their red teeth made them look as though they'd just been eating raw hamburgers with Egerton.

He got hungry but couldn't bring himself to touch the eggs which were all that he had in the way of food. He went out to a restaurant and ordered a salad. He shouted at the waitress: how dare she put tomato ketchup on his salad? Drawing angry red stares he stalked out of the restaurant and crossed the road to a fish-and-chip shop, but the woman started sprinkling little dried flecks of bloody dandruff onto his chips, so he left in disgust.

By morning there was milk in his fridge again and he could enjoy a normal breakfast before driving to work.

"Are you all right, Brian?" Whitehead wanted to know.

"Yes. Why?" he snapped.

"You look a bit harassed, that's all." Defensive. "You will get that editing done, won't you?"

There seemed to be more red cars on the roads than ever. The days were already getting shorter: as he drove up Holloway Road the premature sunset was turning low clouds vermillion.

He finished at the computer on Friday morning and spent the rest of the day checking the hard copy in spite of the eyestrain. There would be no use anyone else in the office proofing it. Although he considered himself underpaid for the work he was doing, he wanted to make sure it was right, in the unlikely event of someone, somewhere appreciating the hard work that had gone into the handbook.

He drove away from the Angel, down towards the roundabout. An enormous sense of release jostled with him for space in the Mini; the end of another week in the office, no more Egerton for two days, liberation from that infernal green computer screen. Since he'd finished on-screen editing before lunch, the effect had already begun to wear off.

He just had to call in at the flat to collect his bag and any messages, then head off up the A1 to the M1 and freedom. Melanie had been working out in W14 and so was going up in her own car. She would probably have been able to get away early, so would be first at the cottage. By the time he got there she'd have it all cosy for him.

The northbound lanes on Holloway Road were chock-a-block, as Linden knew the motorway would also be when he finally reached it. Through the windscreen he admired the beginnings of the sunset; the skies above Highgate were aglow with strange lilacs. Hadn't he seen yesterday's sunset in his rear-view mirror rather than through the windscreen? A small detail.

He reached the turn-off for Sussex Way and his flat. The traffic being as bad as it was, he was glad he'd put his bag in the car that morning and didn't have to make the detour to go and get it now.

He watched a Beetle worm its way out of a side street between two Escorts and into the traffic flow. If this was a stream of traffic then it was a stream of mud. He looked for the Beetle again: was it an old one with a tiny back window and semaphore indicators or a more recent model with big rear-light clusters and fat bumpers? But he couldn't see it and when he thought about it he couldn't remember if he'd caught sight of it in his rear-view mirror or through the windscreen.

On the other side of the road a red Escort nosed out from beside the snooker centre and was allowed to pass between two VW Beetles. The driver of the Escort waved her thanks. Behind Linden impatient drivers pipped their horns, making him jump: the queue in front of him had moved forward.

The traffic didn't get any better; when the M1 intersected the M25 and then merged with the M10, it got worse.

He asked Melanie to put on a tape. She chose the Organ Symphony; at least while they proceeded at 10 miles per hour he was able to hear it.

"Why don't you go to sleep?" he asked her.

"Your car's too noisy," she said. "I wouldn't be able to."

Every few hundred yards the congestion would just

dissolve and Linden would get up to 30 or 40. However, it was always a brief respite and inexplicably the queue tightened up again. Eventually, though, thanks to the domestic attraction for the majority offered by places like Luton, Leighton Buzzard, Milton Keynes, Newport Pagnell and Bedford, there were fewer cars sharing the same lanes and all of them travelling at at least 65 miles per hour. The novelty soon wore off and the tedium of motorway driving set in, exacerbated by the fact that it was by now quite dark.

The tape clicked off, but since he hadn't been able to hear it for the last half hour he didn't bother putting another one on. He wished Melanie were with him to keep him awake. Would she be at the cottage yet, he wondered. He tried to guess who might be driving the Fiesta in front. What kind of person? He accelerated to get closer. A woman, he decided, but not like Melanie, more of a career woman, someone who saw great intrinsic worth in *belonging* to a company, a Company Girl. A female Egerton. He toed the accelerator again. Her hair would be fixed in a "go-ahead" style like some kind of fossilized bird's nest, the brain-eggs long since hatched and flown the nest, leaving only the corporate gloss of cranial vacancy in her eyes.

He was suddenly right on top of the Fiesta.

When the back end collapsed at his side and the car began to swerve, he had no idea what had happened.

He glanced at the passenger seat and seized the steering wheel like the reins of a bolting horse. Steer into the skid, they always said. But what did that mean? Go with it or against it? He swung to the left, trying to aim the front of the car at the hard shoulder and braking as gently as he could without sliding into a new skid.

He never knew how close he came to being hit by the cars which flew past him as he shuddered to a halt on the hard shoulder. He didn't need to hold his hands out to see how much he was shaking; he was still holding the steering wheel and it was trembling, and not on account of the engine, which had stalled. Climbing over the empty seat, he got out on the passenger side, and walked unsteadily round the back of the car to see what had happened. A blowout. The back tyre on the driver's side was shredded. He could just make out the word REMOULD.

He got back in the car and told Melanie what had happened. She was calmer now; the shock had been greater for her since she'd been asleep when it had happened.

He took his spanner and a jack from the boot and set about taking the wheel off. The first nut was a bit difficult so he worked at the other three, which all came off after some effort. The first one wouldn't budge; the spanner's grip began to slide on the nut.

"Shit!" He leant against the Mini, watching the cars streaking past.

He tried the nut again but the spanner was now far too big for it; he was just wearing the edges away; if he continued, it would become impossible to remove.

Linden stopped for breath and looked back up the hard shoulder to see if he could still see the Mini. The car itself was invisible but the hazard lights flashed on and off and on again. They were much

brighter than he would have imagined and he was grateful for them. He continued walking.

Cars sped past him, occupants' faces blank white spaces turned towards him, yet he'd never felt more alone. The sky was black, clouded over; the darkness of the land beyond the motorway uninterrupted by lights. Not even farmers lived here. People only drove through. He fastened all three buttons of his jacket and pulled up the collar. Where the hell was the emergency telephone? One just a few yards from his car was out of order. As was its opposite number which he had reached illegally by crossing the six lanes of the motorway.

Eventually he came upon a telephone which worked and he was able to call for assistance. It seemed so unlikely, that there should be a man waiting by a telephone to take his call and send another man out in a van to rescue him. And yet that was the system he paid for. He was of course glad now that he had subscribed.

He began to walk back. The cold penetrated his thin jacket. Cars swept by only a few feet away, making him feel vulnerable. He lost count of the bridges he passed under. The horizon failed to yield the flashing orange of his hazards. He began to worry that somehow he'd gone wrong. He'd not crossed back after running over to try the telephone on the other side. "Don't be stupid," he said out loud, but the sound of his voice, so feeble and vain, frightened him. He decided that he would turn back at the next bridge, and as the next bridge came into sight, so too did the hazard lights.

They belonged to a P-reg Ford Cortina. A woman with bad teeth sitting in the passenger seat threw him a nervous glance then looked away.

The Mini was another 200 yards further up. As he narrowed the gap from behind, a trick of the shadows cast by passing headlamps made it look as though there were two people already sitting in the front seats.

He clambered in and waited for the van to arrive.

Each passing car shook the little Mini. He put some music on but imagined that it prevented him from hearing the footsteps of an interloper approaching the car. He pressed EJECT. Melanie said: "They won't be long."

It started to rain. Big fat drops exploded on the windscreen. He pictured Melanie at the cottage: making a drink, running a bath, watching the television. He wished he were with her. How long would it be before she started to worry? The rain rattled on the roof as if it were a tent. Suddenly a brilliant flash created a second's daylight in the night. Then the thunder began to roll, like a solo by a drunken timpanist.

When the serviceman arrived, Linden joined him in the teeming rain, but the man couldn't shift the nut either.

"It's only a mile to the next services," the man shouted over the noise of the storm. "I'll tow you there. It'll be easier. I'll be able to get this nut off. More space, more light."

Linden nodded and climbed into the cab as directed.

"It's not far," the man said, when he'd hitched up the back of the Mini to his truck. They moved off and stayed on the hard shoulder. After ten or fifteen minutes

the lights of the services sparkled through the rain. Linden left the man to change the wheel and walked across the rain-slick tarmac to the complex.

In the self-service restaurant he sat down in a red plastic seat with a cup of stewed tea. He was alone in the place apart from a smartly dressed couple who stared miserably at each other's shoulders across a crumb-strewn table.

He stood looking at the telephones, wishing they'd gone to the trouble and expense of installing one in the cottage.

Crossing over the covered footbridge, he stopped in the middle and watched the traffic sweeping underneath in both directions. He felt like a pivot between the two carriageways, as if with his mind he could just switch them. A flash of lightning printed a colour negative on his retina, sending a shiver down his back and dropping a chilled weight in his stomach. With a vague sense of foreboding he reached the end of the bridge and walked down the steps. In the hall area a number of people were grouped around a video game. He joined the back of the group, which was murmuring its praise of the game-player. Someone moved to give Linden a better view. He stood behind a man with tight curly blonde hair, whose hands, he now saw, were manipulating the game's joystick and firing button.

Ships and creatures fell from the top of the screen towards the bottom. The game-player had his own unit which he had to defend and from which he could attack the ships and creatures which if they came into contact with his unit would destroy it. The game was probably an old one, but the curly-haired man was obviously playing it extremely well to have attracted spectators.

The screen was bright green.

Linden was transfixed. He barely registered the man clicking his fingers as he relaxed between one attack and the next.

The screen seemed to get brighter, like a television in a darkening room.

Linden leaned closer. Slowly he began to turn his head to see the face of the man who was playing. But before the player finished the turn Linden shot round the other way and barged his way out of the crowd, running for the doors.

His head pounding, he searched for his car. On the far side of the parking area he saw the serviceman's truck, its orange light still revolving. The man was bending down at the Mini's rear nearside, just tightening the last nut on the changed wheel.

"Quickly," Linden croaked. "I've got to go."

"All right, all right," the man said, kicking the wheel trim into place. "You've got to sign my forms."

The man walked too slowly to the cab of his truck and shuffled around some papers on a clipboard. Linden hovered at his shoulder.

"There," the man said, pointing with a stubby finger.

Linden leaned over. The paper was red. He looked at the man, who pointed again and rubbed a sore red eye with his free hand. Linden scrawled his signature.

"And there."

He signed again and dropped the pen onto the floor of the cab in his haste to get away.

He jumped into the Mini, rammed it into first, thrust the key into the ignition and started the engine as he released the handbrake and turned the wheel. He accelerated and stamped on the brake when he thought he was going to run the serviceman over: but he was behind him in the rear-view mirror, waving his arms and shouting something Linden couldn't hear. He screeched away and built up speed, aiming for the slip road to get back on the motorway. He ignored a road sign which he did recognize – a solid red circle – and sped between two bollards. The man's alarmed face receded to a fleck in his mirror.

The motorway was fairly clear so he accelerated straight into the centre lane, pressing the pedal to the floor. He soon caught up with the red lights ahead. Too quickly, in fact. Suddenly there were swarms of red lights apparently speeding towards him in all three lanes, as if reversing down the motorway at 70 miles per hour.

He turned to Melanie in bewilderment and fear.

But she wasn't there.

And within seconds neither was he.

Nicholas Royle wrote "The Sculptor's Hand" (*Interzone* 32). The above piece was actually accepted by us slightly earlier, and is representative of the sort of edgy horror fiction



which has gained the author a growing reputation. Though still in his mid-20s, he has now sold more than thirty short stories to various magazines and original anthologies, proving that persistence (allied with talent) can still pay off – even in these days of supposedly scarce markets for short fiction.

COMMENT

Best Foot Forward David Langford

One neglected literary form, as *Interzone* knows, is the covering letter you send with your deathless manuscript. Thanks to industrial spies, I've secured several examples familiar to editors all over the world, and especially in Brighton. The challenge is to detect the subtle reason why in each case the recipient reached for his or her trusty rejection slip without finishing the covering note, let alone starting the manuscript. Match your wits against the professionals!

Dear Editor:

What you're waiting for is a new idea to shake up the fuddy-duddy world of science fiction. Well here it is! Based on the mindbogglingly innovative concept of Earth being struck by a giant alien meteor with startling results, my novel *Lucifer's Footfall: The Forge of Shiva* is...

Dear Sir:

I see you publish science articles, so you'll love my enclosed poem *The Joy of Superstring Theory*, a true epic in nineteen thousand heroic couplets. Also, it is allegorical too. Mrs Gilbey of our village Literary Circle thought it was VERY INTERESTING and I know you will not need no more recommendation...

Sir:

I cannot reveal my blockbuster plot to you as yet, since you would steal it and have it published under some house name by one of your tame hacks, thereby defrauding me of millions. I am on to the little games of you so-called "publishers." Before submitting the outline I want a firm contract guaranteeing a seven-figure advance and 110% of gross film rights. For the present I am not revealing my address – attempts to

trace me and steal my notes will be useless. Kindly reply via the classified advertisement columns of...

Attention: Editor!

Revelations chap. xiii clearly shows us the clue. We know it takes Halley's Comet 76 years to complete one orbit but are you aware that if you add 2000 AD to Archbishop Ussher's 4004 BC and divide the total by 76 it goes exactly 79 times? Since 1990 is actually the year 2000 this shows that the Second Coming will occur on 12 July. My manuscript conclusively proves...

Dear Mega-Ed:

I was having this totally ace game of *Bludgeons and Blackguards* with my friend Irving when we realized the excitement of our role-playing campaign would make an incredibly triff novel! So here, based on that month of

fun, is *Lepermage of Elfspasm*, a brilliant fantasy dekalogy in which a lovable crew of Elves, Dwarves, Cats, Boggits, Men and a token Voluptuous Nymph go up against the Cold Dark Dread Force of Chaos Blood Death Evil, which...

Darling Editor:

I saw your picture in *The Bookseller* and at once knew we would become very close friends! I am 19 and very experienced. Perhaps we could have lunch together. Or breakfast. Of course I will be quite delighted to buy the meal! (Don't you love champagne?) Here is my photograph for you to keep. To fall in love sight unseen – it's like something from a mediaeval romance, isn't it? Speaking of which, I know you'd like a peep at the enclosed MS of my richly romantic historical novel, *I Was Edward II's Teenage Groupie*...

Hi, Editorperson:

There's never been a novel like this! Imagine the excitement of a plotline in which all the past Dr Who's meet up with Darth Vader, Superman, Gandalf, Marvin the Paranoid Android, Indiana Jones, Crocodile Dundee, Captain Kirk and Spock, Snoopy, Judge Dredd, Roger Rabbit, James Bond, E.T., Mickey Mouse, Rambo and Jimmy Swaggart! I am sure a big outfit like yours will have no trouble sorting out copyright problems, and then...

Dear Idiotr:

Plees find enclosed my novvle, it is handwrote Im afraid but you will not Mind this becuase GENIEUS cant be mistakken can it? No retern post enclosed sinse this will nott be nesary as you will See...

Dear Sir or Madam:

The MS herewith is a very first draft. I could change almost anything on request. For example, in the slave bondage orgy scenes I am open to suggestions (your knowledge must be so much greater than mine). Just say the word and I'll alter the lard to cod liver oil, or the protagonist's name to – well, it's a teensy bit obvious, should we tone it down to Steelram or Goatfetish? Also there are details about bestial felation which need checking in the light of your mature experience. I'm willing to take advice on any point. Just send a fully detailed letter of instruction and comment, and...

Editor, dear Editor:

Ever heard how George Orwell's best novels were bounced by several major publishers before they got to be international best-sellers? Well, history repeats itself, and my enclosed *Big Brother Farm* has actually been rejected by exactly the same wilfully

blind publishing outfits as Orwell's. To add to the astonishing coincidence, I have chest trouble just like him. Knowing all this, can you afford to take the chance of not...

Dear Skiffy Editor:

This is a guaranteed SF best-seller – you don't even need to read it! My change of name will assure its success. I have the legal documents all ready to fill in: the final decision is yours. Do you prefer Isaac Amizov, Alfred C. Clarke or Roberta Heinlein? I had also thought of H.G. Welks, but do not think this would be such a good seller...

To Whom It May Concern:

Not merely a work of high entertainment – my novel is more. Here in fictional guise are the truly shocking facts about the conspiracy of scientists, theologians and armed librarians who control us. Intentionally I have given over six chapters to exposing the jealously guarded truth about gravity alone – not a pull as *Communism* would have you believe, but a push! Unless you too are blind to reason or controlled by laser signals broadcast from Chinese UFOs, you cannot fail to...

Dear Gagged Lackey of the Thatcherite Junta:

Your lickspittle rag won't dare publish this, but...

You see, of course, the common fault in all these? Not one of them addresses the editor correctly, as "O Mighty Being From Whose Fundament The Illumination Of The World Proceeds."

(Dave Langford)

Note: the above piece first appeared in slightly different form in 8000 Plus magazine, 1988. We are grateful to Dave Langford for permission to re-use it here. Every word is true! Charles Platt will return next month, and we also hope to begin a new "Comment" column by Bruce Sterling very soon.

A Convention in Gdansk

Jim Walker

Poland in December? A Science-Fiction Convention in a language I wouldn't understand? Well I do read sf, I enjoy foreign travel and I remain fascinated by events behind the now threadbare Iron Curtain.

So when I read in *Interzone* in August 1989 that the Polish National

SF Convention would be held in Gdansk it took two whole minutes to decide that I had to go. The fact that it would be my first Convention anywhere just made it more essential to be there.

After the standard hassle coordinating plane tickets, passport, visa, currency voucher and evidence of accommodation, I left Heathrow on Wednesday 29th November, arriving at a snow-covered and ill-lit Warsaw airport just as it was getting dark. Leaving Warsaw Central on the midnight train, I arrived in Gdansk at 5 am to be met and swept up by the amazing Polish hospitality which lasted the whole four days of the Convention.

It was held outside Gdansk, in a large resort hotel in a pine forest on the edge of the Baltic. The theme of the Con was "The World After Catastrophe" and the main corridor of the hotel had been decorated with camouflage nets, strewn with boxes, slogans and assorted rubbish to create (especially at 5.30 am) a very convincing post-holocaust scene. Suitably boggled, I fell into bed until breakfast.

By the time everyone else arrived, there were about 550 Poles, 20 Czechs, eight Russians, two Lithuanians, three Italians and me wandering around the hotel. At first only about 10% of the participants were female, but this seemed to grow as more people arrived at the weekend. The general age seemed to be between 18 and 30.

The organized events of the Convention consisted of video films and talks. Four different videos were on show in different rooms up to midnight, then two rooms continued until 6 am. The videos were nearly all from the West, with the English script overdubbed in Polish. About three seconds into each speech the Polish translator cut in and I lost the rest of the words. This did make following the plot a bit difficult at times.

Fifty-four films were shown, including classics like *Brazil*, *Blade Runner* and the new colour *Metropolis*. Meanwhile in another room there were various seminars, discussions and talks. One of them was partly translated for me. Given by a Polish scientist involved, I think, in both the US and USSR space programmes, it was about the Soviet mission to Mars. He was not optimistic about space opera coming to pass, due to boring things like bone embrittlement and fuel weight ratios, etc.

The entertainment was completed by nightly discos, a fancy dress competition (amazing!) and of course room parties. I can recommend Hevelius beer, brewed in Gdansk since 1635. (The first brewer, Johann Hevelius, was a local astronomer and comet spotter.) The food was not exciting and not very generous but for Poland in 1989, at an event that had many last-minute

bookings, I was just glad not to be hungry.

On Saturday a Survival Game was held out in the woods. A series of contestants ran from place to place, competing in six different survival activities. These were – bandaging the head of a casualty, shooting at bottles with an air pistol, crossing between trees on a rope, knife throwing, identifying edible/non-edible fungi from pictures, and doing something I couldn't understand with an oil drum, a bottle, some mysterious liquid and a broken hand pump. To make it more interesting, the contestants all wore full Warsaw Pact anti-gas overalls and on one section a gas mask as well.

The unspoiled Baltic beach was five minutes' walk away through the beautiful pinewoods. It had interesting heaps of driftwood amongst which it was possible to find small pieces of amber. My hosts also took me to Gdansk, the historic Hanseatic city, faithfully reconstructed after wartime devastation, and to Malbork, the colossal castle of the Teutonic Knights, very impressive beside the frozen river Nogat.

Since I don't speak any Polish, I could only really communicate with the few Poles and Russians who spoke English. English is the nearest thing to an international language. I listened to a business conversation between a Polish publisher and an Italian artist about the cover artwork for the Polish translation of *Blood Music*. They were speaking English.

What of the science-fiction scene in Poland? The main feature is the SF Clubs which exist all over the country. In Gdansk alone (population 1.5M) there are 10 clubs. They have names like Galactica, Collaps, Phobos, Mordor, Gateway and Hydrus. Galactica is one of the larger clubs, meeting twice a week with an attendance of 40-50 people.

The clubs are federated into the Gdanski Klub Fantastyki, which

organized the Convention. Nationally there is an "official" science-fiction magazine and a small number of officially-produced sf novels and translations.

Many of the larger clubs also produce their own magazines, and translations of novels and stories which are self-financing. There is a big market in Poland; a translation of a good English-language novel can sell 70-100,000 copies. American authors are well known; the popular names being Silverberg, Dick, Le Guin, Sheekley and Heinlein. David Brin's *The Postman* is already known and admired. Comic books and superb artwork are also produced in Poland, and sf generally seems to be thriving in the land of Stanislaw Lem.

In the Soviet Union, science fiction began to be popular in the 1960s but the Club phenomenon is more recent. In ten years the number of clubs has grown from a dozen to 300, and at least 60 of them have joined the All-Union Association of SF Clubs. As in Poland, there is "official" science fiction on the one hand and the clubs' activities on the other. The official works are ideologically sound, financially supported by the State, and largely unread by the fans.

The hunger for sf that people want to read is being met by cooperative publishing (including one involving the Strugatsky brothers) and by the clubs themselves. The clubs are facing difficulties because of the economic situation in the USSR; however they now have the opportunity to become self-financing, by publishing and other means. They can thus establish their own legal and financial independence.

In some parts of the USSR, such as Lithuania and the Ukraine, the question of which language sf should be published in also arises. This is inextricably linked to the nationality struggles going on there at the moment. As always behind the Iron Curtain, everything is political in one way or another.

My only disappointment in Gdansk was the unfortunate non-appearance of Brian Aldiss, the star guest, due to illness. In his letter of apology Brian remarked that his early novel *Non-Stop* had been very popular in Poland a few years ago. He attributed this, rightly I am sure, to the description of the giant starship, isolated, deteriorating and going nowhere: an irresistible image of the Polish state before Solidarity.

Poland is changing now, though economically things are still pretty tough. But put 600 young Poles in a hotel by the Baltic and they certainly know how to enjoy themselves. Being one of the very few Westerners had its advantages. Apart from the wonderful hospitality I received, one of the highlights for me was being asked to judge the "Angry Mutant" Competition... (don't ask).

So now I'm hooked on Conventions and fully intend to be at the Worldcon in the Hague this year. See you there!

(Jim Walker)

Note: for information on the World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in the Hague, 23rd-27th August 1990, write to "ConFiction," PO Box 95370, 2509 CJ The Hague, Netherlands. The deadline for prior registration by post is 15th July, but you should join **immediately** if you wish to vote for the Hugo Awards.

WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

The Fury That Hell Withheld

Brian Stableford

“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,” Congreve assures us, “Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned.” Congreve was a man much preoccupied with the romantic passions, and this observation is made in a poem called “The Mourning Bride.” In the Classical World things were seen differently, and it was held that ties of blood were more vital than those of amatory attachment. The Furies of Classical mythology were not unleashed to punish faithless lovers, but to persecute undutiful children. In that tarnished Golden Age the fiercest hatreds and most awful jealousies were stored up in the bonds of maternal and filial affection, and the most celebrated victim of the Furies of old was the mother-murdering Orestes.

It is a matter for argument whether our own new-dawning era has more in common with the age of Congreve or the Classical era of gods and heroes. In purely historical terms, Congreve is closer to us, but our nascent Golden Age, when men are beginning to acquire godlike power over the organic and inorganic alike, is in its fashion a Promethean Era when the old order is not merely in decay but liable to be turned upside-down. The tales we must tell of the time that is soon to be may echo in many ways the tales the Greeks and Romans told of the time behind them, and it is a question again to be asked what Furies Hell might have saved for the special damnation of the men of the future.

The names of the heroes of the biotechnological revolution have become legend, and among them is the name of Adam Emden, who was a doctor of medicine in the early years of the New Millennium. He was one of the first men to involve himself with the applications of techniques of genetic engineering in the treatment of physical injury. He was primarily interested in mobilizing and augmenting the body's own powers of self-repair, by accelerating the healing processes that mend wounds and by persuading the body to regenerate lost limbs or damaged organs. Nature has not provided the human body with such abilities because nature cannot keep the whole human entity alive while drastic reconstructions of particular parts occur; but modern technology can sustain the blood supply to a human brain even in the absence of a heart, thus buying the time for drastic repairs to be carried out, if only the genes in the tissue-cells can be persuaded to co-operate. Adam Emden became a sculptor of human clay, forcing the cells of human tissues to revert to an undifferentiated

state of blastular innocence and then causing them to multiply and re-specialize themselves into the desired structures. In this way, he helped deformed children to acquire physical perfection; he saved the victims of many spinal injuries from paralysis; he gave new eyes to the blind; and to those who needed them he gave new hearts, new kidneys and new livers, drawing those gifts from the hapless flesh of the victims themselves.

Had there been no more to say than that he did these things, Adam Emden would have been hero enough. As it was, though, the world in which he lived did not ease his path to these triumphs. Many of the processes of gene manipulation that he put to these uses were first developed by companies involved in food technology or drug manufacture, and these companies fought long and hard to protect their discoveries with patents. Having learned the arts of genetic reconstruction, Adam Emden had to go to battle in the courtrooms of the world in order to establish his right to use them.

The so-called Patent Wars, which were fought to determine what rights could and should exist in this new era of technological development, extended over ten long years. For that entire time Adam Emden was one of the most prominent contenders, driven by a powerful determination to secure what he considered justice for all the people who needed his help. He quickly came to be seen by the public at large as a tireless crusader, a champion of the weak against the strong, a man who cared for the rights of all instead of the wealth of the few. In the eyes of the world, Adam Emden's opponents were fighting for greed and the power of exploitation, while he was a speaker for the helpless. His case was that the lame should not need to pay for legs; that the blind should not have to pay for eyes; common humanity, in his view, demanded that all people must have the opportunity of equality which cruel fate had hitherto denied to so many.

When he began his long campaign, Adam Emden was neither a lawyer nor a politician. As the Patent Wars ran their course, he was forced to become both. He tried as hard as he could to keep up his real work – by which he meant his list of pseudosurgical operations – but he was manoeuvred by circumstance into a situation where he had to follow two other professions as well, spending as much time in court as in the operating theatre, and as much time again in campaigning and propagandizing. The effect of all this on his private life was devastating. A hero of the New

Millennium has little life that is private in any case; television has all but obliterated the very idea of privacy thanks to its self-appointed licence to intrude and the remorseless intimacy with which its cameras zero in on the personality of its celebrities.

Adam Emden was a family man before the Patent Wars began; he had a wife named Clementina, two daughters named Phoebe and Alexia, and a son named Aristide. By the time that fame closed in on their father, the three children were beyond infancy but still far from maturity, and all three had to grow up in the full glare of public interest.

The three children of Adam Emden suffered mixed fortunes as a result of this pressure. Had they been shadowed from the light of popular attention they might have found their own interests and projects, but as things were they could not help but be involved in their father's crusades. Alexia, the youngest child, became more tightly enwrapped by it all than the others – she it was who became her father's constant companion and helper, his amanuensis and his shield against the bombardment of enquiry to which he was constantly subject. In this role she quickly displaced Clementina, who tried for a while to cope with it but had neither the skill nor the commitment necessary to carry it off successfully.

Aristide tried hard to model himself upon his marvellous parent, whom he idolized. He studied medicine, and the techniques of bioengineering, with a special kind of fervour, setting himself standards to achieve that were almost too high to permit success. It may be that no one has ever desired more ardently to be a genius than Aristide Emden, and it is certainly remarkable that he did not come apart under the pressure to which he subjected himself. Whether or not he achieved genius must remain a matter of opinion, but he certainly became brilliant, and those in a position to judge considered him even more adept in the operating theatre than his father. As a researcher he interested himself particularly in the treatment of cancers, and tried hard to bring nearer the day when his father's techniques would be adequate to the task of making the body repair itself after cancerous attack – one of the most intractable of the medical problems of his day.

His elder sister, Phoebe, was not so successful – or perhaps she was simply not so fortunate. Her character was already well on the way to formation when the Patent Wars began, and she had not the same opportunity as her siblings to adapt to the peculiar circumstances of celebrity. Her attempts to find a role which she could adequately play within the circus of her father's destiny came to nothing, and she developed a terrible sense of failure which led her to such reckless self-disregard as to fall victim to a black market psychotropic drug of particularly vicious character. Once she became physically dependent the path of degeneracy leading to death led steeply downhill. When she was terminally ill, her father tried to operate on her, desperately using techniques which he was virtually inventing as he proceeded, trying to regenerate the tissues of her brain. But there was nothing he could do to save her; her self-inflicted injuries were far beyond the scope of his art.

The tragedy of Phoebe Emden's death was a cause

celèbre, and the publicity which it generated had at least as much effect on those to whom she had been near and dear as the death itself. Adam Emden was not permitted to indulge himself much with grief. He had more important things to do, a heroic status to live up to, and it was therefore necessary for him to put the incident behind him as quickly and as totally as possible. Aristide and Alexia, by the same token, had not time or energy to spare in exhausting themselves with sorrow. Clementina, by contrast, found a strange kind of opportunity in grief. She found it all too easy to identify with her firstborn daughter's predicament. She too had made a life of her own, and acquired an identity of her own, long before the Emden Patent War bandwagon began to roll. Indeed, she had sufficient identity and purpose of her own to carry on even though she could not ride the bandwagon – but this did not prevent her nursing a sense of failure and a sense of resentment that she was left to one side while her younger daughter took the chief supportive role. Circumstance had led Phoebe to despise and abuse herself; it began to lead Clementina to feel justified in despising and abusing Adam Emden. She began – perhaps subconsciously – to blame Adam for Phoebe's death, and to blame him too for her own feelings of wretchedness, which were monstrously fed and inflamed by her grief. Clementina never did set that grief aside, and felt herself wounded by the fact that all the other members of the family did so with such efficient alacrity.

It is not surprising, given these circumstances, that Clementina Emden took a lover, nor that this lover should also be a man who had cause to hate her husband. Joseph Hess was undoubtedly an attractive man in his own right, just as Clementina had conserved her own beauty into late middle age, but what drew the two together was not so much spontaneous passion as the awareness that knowledge of their association would hurt the feelings of Adam Emden. Hess was not directly involved in the Patent Wars – not, at any rate, as a courtroom combatant. He was, however, a bioengineer working for one of the multinational corporations who were Adam Emden's adversaries. He had been intimately involved in the work which had generated some of the key patents relating to the blastularization and respecialization of tissue cells, and had conducted some spectacular experiments with animal subjects. Some of these experiments, indeed, had gained him a notoriety which few scientists would have envied. In a time when most experimenters were wary of the Ethics Committees which watched over all adventures in vivisection, Hess sneered at them for alleged moral cowardice. His publicity-conscious employers might have restrained him from expressing such opinions openly, but his work yielded such rewards that they chose instead to defend him and protect him from lawsuits involving charges of cruel and inhumane treatment. His most famous series of experiments involved the de-composition and re-differentiation of brain tissue in living animals which had been taught various skills and responses; by this means he sought to discover the extent to which behaviours were hardwired into the brain, and in what ways learned behaviours were stored. He was never allowed to work with a human subject, but he said in public on

more than one occasion that if anyone in the world could have helped Phoebe Emden in the last stages of her addiction, then it was he and not Adam Emden. Adam, who already despised him, found this statement uniquely objectionable – Clementina, by contrast, believed it.

The affair between Joseph Hess and Clementina Emden quickly became the subject of comment in the yellow press. They did not strive too hard to be discreet. Adam at first simply disregarded the reports, though he probably believed them. When the speculations became too open to ignore, he still refused to be moved by them. He did not sue for divorce, nor did he discuss the possibility of divorce with his wife. He moved out of what had been the family home – though in truth he had spent little enough time there during the past two or three years – and left Clementina to enjoy or modify her solitude as she wished. This indifference annoyed Clementina more than any action would have. Undoubtedly she felt herself scorned, and undoubtedly it stirred a kind of fury within her, but hers was not a hot temper and her anger was a sullen nursling that never left her, but seemed rather to drain her vitality. Alone, she might not have formed a genuine resolution to murder Adam Emden, though she certainly would have brooded on the possibility and fantasized about the action, but her murderous feelings achieved a curious coition with the feelings of Joseph Hess.

Hess's hatred of Adam Emden was by no means strong enough in itself to prompt him to consider murder, but hatred had never figured large in his motivation. What moved Hess was more a kind of pride, not in his work as work but in his work as an exercise of power. This pride, in fact, recalls in some ways the Classical sin of hubris, for what Hess loved was an imagined godlike quality in his experimentation. His contempt for the Ethics Committees and other organizations which tried to interrupt him was allied with a covert delight in the blasphemous aspects of his research: that it caused outrage in others was one of the things he most loved in it. What attracted Joseph Hess in the possibility of murdering Adam Emden, therefore, was not that it would appease some wrathful lust within him, but firstly that it would be an act of unholy bravado to bring down the nearest thing to a saint that the modern world contained, and secondly that he was convinced that he could get away with it. Hess believed, in fact, that despite the obviousness of his and Clementina's motive, they could – given the aid of his technical skills – avoid all suspicion. He believed that he could commit not merely a murder, but a perfect murder, and the aesthetic attraction of that possibility was something which moved him very powerfully indeed.

This combination of motives proved irresistible. Each alone might have proved impotent, but their connection was synergistic. Within days of first mentioning the desire to destroy her husband, Clementina Emden was caught up in a plot to achieve that end. She knew her husband's ways intimately enough to decoy him into returning to the family home, arranging the circumstances and the timing so that even Alexia did not know that he had gone. There, in a tiled bathroom which was very easy to clean, she and



Illustrations by Martin Perrott

Joseph Hess stabbed him to death. Then Hess removed the body to his laboratory, and set about repairing the damage. A body does not die all at once, and they did not need any complicated machines to maintain it; their aim was not to revive it, but simply to make it whole again, removing every sign of violence. When this was done, there was no trace on Adam Emden's corpse to betray what had been done to him. He was, however, a corpse; though Hess made the unclotted blood course through his brain again, it could not restore that brain to function. The mind of Adam Emden – the soul of the saint – was gone, and the body in this vegetable condition could be sustained for only a few hours before it simply stopped again.

Clementina Emden and Joseph Hess put Adam Emden's body in a place where it might plausibly be found, but which had no connection with them. Then they sat back to wait for the public distress which would follow the discovery of the body. They knew that no doctor in the world, however puzzled, could possibly come to any conclusion but that Adam Emden's heart had simply failed. In this assumption, of course, they were right. The inquest recorded a verdict of death by natural causes, and left only two people in all the world suspicious and dissatisfied. Those two people were Aristide and Alexia Emden, who remained mute at the inquest because they had not a shred of real evidence to justify their suspicions.

At first, even Aristide and Alexia thought themselves unreasonable for not being entirely satisfied with the official version of their father's death. Aristide was, after all, a scientist, and a scientist who set himself very high standards. He was not a man to cherish and lend credence to vague feelings unsupported by proof. Alexia felt that her own unease might most easily be interpreted as a side-effect of her terrible feeling of loss; after all, with her father's death her entire *raison d'être* had been suddenly withdrawn. But the public and private ceremonies which followed the death brought them into frequent contact with their mother, and in her behaviour they gradually became convinced that they could read signs of guilt.

It is not entirely clear what they saw. Clementina was a strong woman, and by no means the kind to be overcome by the enormity of what she had done. It is unlikely that she never felt so much as an atom of remorse, but it certainly cannot be said that she exhibited its effects. She made no very strenuous effort to feign grief, but in the circumstances that could hardly be required of her. When it transpired that Adam had not bothered to change his will in order to accommodate the change in their circumstances, so that Clementina inherited the bulk of the estate, she received the news with a reasonable degree of indifference, and made no extravagant plans for herself. The one real consequence of what had happened was that she conceived a strong dislike for Joseph Hess. The two had in any case been bound together primarily by their mutual opposition to Adam rather than by affection, and though their motives for murder had cross-fertilized one another they remained different and distinct. Clementina did not much like Hess's pride in his accomplishment, and he thought her hatred a rather pitiful thing. They ceased to see one another,

and began to react to the thought and mention of one another with reflexive distaste. It might have been this which provided Aristide and Alexia with subliminal clues. Something did, and once they confided in one another, their suspicions fed one another in much the same way as the murderers' motives.

Aristide, once an awareness of possibility was planted in his brain, was quick to realize that skills such as his own might have repaired a damaged body to present the appearance of a natural death. Once such an idea was born in his mind, he quickly began to consider whether he might find evidence which the coroner had overlooked. The scientific rigour ingrained in his thought, which had earlier forbidden him seriously to entertain an hypothesis without evidence, now required him to put the hypothesis to the proof, so that it might be properly falsified. He applied to a court, therefore, to have Adam Emden's body exhumed from its honoured grave, inventing as a pretext certain anonymous letters, sent both to the family and the press, claiming that the body in the grave was that of another man. To the court and the interested world at large he expressed the opinion that there was not a shred of truth in these letters, but that it must be his distasteful duty to prove the fact. That he volunteered to carry out what would undoubtedly be an unpleasant second autopsy himself was considered by many to be an act of heroism such as could only be expected in the worthy son of a great man.

Clementina Emden and Joseph Hess were not unworried by this turn of events, and Clementina publicly opposed her son's capitulation to the innuendo of the crank letters – an opposition which seemed reasonable enough even to the anxious children. Clementina was not so foolish, though, as to get in touch with Hess, and he suppressed his worry ruthlessly, his pride asserting itself privately as powerfully as it so often did in public. Hess was not afraid of Aristide; he had full confidence in the perfection of his achievement. This confidence seemed to have been borne out when Aristide, having carefully examined his father's body, announced to the press that – as he had always believed – the wicked allegations of the anonymous letters were completely unfounded, and that everything was as it should be.

Hess's confidence was, however, misplaced. Aristide was lying. He had not found that everything was as it should have been.

It was not that Hess had made some dreadful mistake, or even that he had overlooked something trivial but vital. Ironically, he had done his job too well. He had restored Adam Emden's body to perfection, but Adam Emden's body – like the body of any other ordinary adult – had not been perfect before the knife-wounds were inflicted by his murderers. As with everyone else, Adam Emden had accumulated a small burden of scars and benign skin cancers – moles and other such growths. Pretty women, and some vain men, had such blemishes repaired by cosmetic pseudosurgery of exactly the kind which Adam practised, but he had always disdained such wasteful use of resources. There was nothing so large or obtrusive that it might have qualified as a distinguishing mark in a police file, but Alexia had lived so closely with her father that she knew his appearance very well – better, in fact, than her mother, who had shared his

bed but had never paid the slightest attention to such trivial matters. Alexia's love for her father was of a different kind, owing more to worship than to lust, and she *did* notice. She was able to tell Aristide exactly what to look for, and when he failed to find it he knew that the body had been tampered with, and that it had been reconstructed by someone almost as expert as himself.

Aristide and Alexia never gave serious consideration to the possibility of going to the police. Though they knew that their evidence was conclusive, they also knew that it was not sufficiently dramatic to convince a jury. In any case, they had their own ideas about justice.

From Alexia's point of view, what Hess and her mother had done was not mere murder but a more heinous crime. Just as Clementina had not forgiven Adam for Phoebe's death, so Alexia had not forgiven Clementina her lack of forgiveness. Alexia was happy enough to sacrifice herself to the service of her father's ambitions, but in doing so she had always been conscious that she was doing a duty that should have been Clementina's. She always felt that she was, in her father's eyes, a substitute for Clementina – a substitute who could never really be adequate, because even though she did everything she could to the best of her ability, there was always one aspect of her mother's role she never could take. She could not be a sexual substitute. She always believed, probably correctly, that Adam Emden nursed a secret bitterness about his sexual estrangement from Clementina, and felt deeply that he could never love her as much as he had once loved her mother. This belief had fed Alexia's resentment of her mother: a resentment which she justified as a resentment of Clementina's failure to do her duty, betraying not merely Adam Emden himself, but the ideals which he stood for as well.

Aristide had not the same idolatrous attitude toward the person of his father, but he did have a worshipful regard for the work and the mission which he had shared with him. In his eyes, the guiltier party was Hess, who had spoiled and corrupted the art and science which, in Adam Emden's hands, had always been used for the good. In Aristide's view, what Hess had committed was not simply homicide but a Satanic desecration of all that a man such as he should have held dear.

When Aristide and Alexia began to plan revenge, therefore, they were not simply seeking reparation for a common crime. Each was possessed by a more ambitious fury, and because the two furies were different their mingling was as synergistic as the mingling of murderous motives which had propelled their intended victims.

"We must," said Aristide, "serve them as they have served our father. We must turn their own evil upon them; I must use the art that Hess used to conceal his actions to conceal my own. Instead of exposing their action, we must hide it, and we must hide its reparation too. That way, the memory of our father will remain untainted. And this will be the end of the matter. Only I could have detected Hess's crime; when he is dead there will be none who can detect mine. I could, if necessary, restore his body as he restored

our father's, and no matter what agonies and mutilations we inflict upon it, no trace would be left. All would be cleansed, washed away by the baptism of my art."

"Amen to that," replied Alexia, and they began to plan what they might do.

"This must be our father's vengeance," Aristide insisted, "and we but its instruments. If the murderers are to be rent as they rent him, then it should be his hand which wields the knife – whether it be a literal or a metaphorical knife."

"On the matter of principle," said Alexia, "I agree – but I do not see the possibility."

"I saw it as soon as I knew what Hess had done," her brother told her. "He took advantage of the fact that the body does not die all at once; when the personality is obliterated there remains enough life in the cells of the body's tissues to regenerate them. He brought our father back to life, hours after his death, though it was a mindless life that could not endure. By the time the body came into my hands, weeks had passed – but still the cells were not entirely beyond recall. Perhaps one in a hundred still retained the capability of biochemical functioning. I knew what had happened as soon as I had examined the surface of the body, but I still proceeded with a thorough autopsy. I recovered tissues of every different kind, and immediately placed them in culture-solutions in order to revive and reblastularize them. The cells which were able to come back to life cannibalized their dead neighbours."

"Do you mean that you can grow an entire new body?"

Aristide shook his head. "Alas, no. Cells have a limited power of self-reproduction because errors accumulate in their nucleic acids and their structural proteins. Reblastularization cannot repair the DNA itself – merely the switches which operate the genes within different kinds of cell. The cells which I have taken have some capacity to grow, but when I combine them all they would not be able to produce a body any bigger than an apple, nor would that body be able to differentiate itself into any kind of manikin or homunculus, much as I would like to model it into that appearance. But I think it just possible that I could make a pair of hands."

For a moment, the horror of the idea eclipsed Alexia's desire to find some extraordinary means of destroying the murderers. "My God!" she said.

"The problem," Aristide continued, patiently, "is to give to a pair of disembodied hands any semblance of function. The idea is old, in the context of supernatural fiction, but without magic to aid me it will not be easy to make the sinews pull and the muscles grip. I can energize the hands with a fluid injection, but the mechanics of the problem defeat me. Death by strangulation, I regret to say, is out of the question. And there is no way in the world that a disembodied hand can wield a knife. I believe that I could make each hand capable of one convulsive clutch, but that would be all. There is no real leverage, you see."

By this time, Alexia was beginning to see. Though it was difficult for her to assume the same attitude of clinical detachment which came easily to her brother, she was by no means immune to the fascination of the subject.

"If a disembodied hand cannot wield a dagger," she said, eventually, "then we must look beyond the imagery of old-fashioned horror stories. Your art must surely permit possibilities of which the Gothic imagination never dreamed."

"Indeed so," Aristide agreed, readily. "And I hope that you will feel, as I do, that the poetry of the justice in what I am about to suggest transcends any trivial issue of tit for tat. I cannot make a homunculus, or even a fragment of a whole body, to do our bidding. But it would be silly, I think, to require that the instrument of our dispensation would be that kind of crude image of the murdered victim. We are scientific sophisticates, you and I, and we know that the identity of a man is in his genes, at the cellular level, not in the appearance of his face, or in his fingerprints. The cells themselves, suitably engineered, can be our agents. We need not assemble them into any kind of crude pastiche of the individual to whom they once belonged. Of course, the murderers will not then be able to see with their immediate sensory apparatus what it is that is being done to them, but we should remember that they too are as sophisticated as we are. If we can explain to them what we have done, when it is too late for them to do anything about it, then that knowledge will have as profound an effect upon them as the sight of any avenging face or disembodied hand might have had upon the villain of an ancient horror story. They will see all the more clearly with the mind's eye – do you not agree?"

Alexia did agree, and Aristide then told her what it was in his mind to do.

It was no more difficult for Aristide and Alexia to plan their execution than it had been for the two murderers to plan their crime. Aristide had simply to tell his mother that he wished to bring about a reconciliation of the family in the wake of the tragedy which it had suffered. He begged her to give him the opportunity to heal old wounds, to repair the body of the family much as Adam Emden himself had repaired the damaged bodies of individuals. He could be persuasive when he wanted, and his mother was willing enough to be persuaded. She felt herself very much alone now, and hoped that much might be gained from an orgy of mutual forgiveness. Aristide invited his mother and his sister, with much ceremony, to a symbolic feast at his own home. Then, without telling Clementina, he issued an invitation to Joseph Hess.

This required greater diplomatic skill, but the story which Aristide told was in essence the same one: he claimed that he wanted all to be forgiven and forgotten. Aristide claimed that he had been disappointed by the fact that his father's death had apparently interrupted a relationship which had given his mother much solace, that he understood now how much strain the love affair had placed on everyone, and that he thought that the time had come for an all-round reconciliation. Hess was tempted by the invitation, not so much because he wanted to restore loving contact with Clementina, but because it amused his colossal pride. Hess easily allowed himself to fall into the error of believing that Aristide was too naïve to understand the hatred that had existed between Adam Emden and himself. He could not help but be

attracted by an invitation to be wholesomely reconciled with the unsuspecting family of a man he had been pleased to kill. And so he delivered himself up into the jaws of the trap that had been laid for him. Clementina was, of course, surprised to see him, but she too accepted the reasons which Aristide was quick to offer her, and the four sat down to dine together.

Afterwards, when Aristide stood to make a speech which Clementina and Hess expected to be sentimental and pleading, Clementina was genuinely touched and Hess thoroughly pleased with himself. Their contentment, though, was short-lived.

"There is in Classical mythology," Aristide told them, "a tale of a man who was summoned by another, who was secretly his enemy, to a great feast. There, unknown to himself, he was served the flesh of his own children. If my memory serves me correctly, it was Atreus who served up the flesh of the children of his brother Thyestes, who had deceived him with his wife; the blood-feud thus originated extended over several generations – Aegisthus the son of Thyestes later murdered Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, after seducing his wife Clytemnestra, after which Aegisthus and Clytemnestra were killed by Agamemnon's son Orestes. But these details are unimportant, save to dramatize the chains of consequence that an evil act may have. The vengeance of Atreus has been the basis of several famous horror stories, and tempted even Shakespeare to its use. But we live in a more sophisticated world now, where such crudities have no place. Nevertheless, I have to tell you that there was in what you have just eaten something which you could not know about, and I think I can say with confidence that you might rather have dined on the flesh of your children.

"I hope that you will by now have guessed that I myself sent the anonymous letters that gave cause for the exhumation of my father's body, and that they were a mere pretext, enabling me to satisfy myself that he really had been murdered. The crime could have been committed and concealed only by two particular individuals working in association, and those two individuals were also the only persons who had a sufficiently strong motive for the crime. You will no doubt forgive me for not boring you with accusations and arguments in proof, as you will presumably be hungry for information as to what distressful thing it is that you have just consumed. It was, of course, the flesh of my father, which I removed from his body when I conducted my autopsy and revived using much the same methods – more cleverly – that you, Dr Hess, used to repair his body when you removed the signs of whatever injuries you inflicted upon him. You were too polite, I noticed, to comment that the courses were a little too cool; they had to be, in order not to injure the living cells that were hidden within them.

"The knowledge that you have committed the sin of cannibalism probably does not worry you overmuch – you have, after all, already killed my father, and are bound to be less distraught at the thought of eating him than Thyestes was at the thought of feasting on his murdered children. But those cells which you have consumed were no mere meat. Each one carried into the depths of your own bodies a massive

supplement of nucleic acids: new genes and active chromosomal fragments of the kind we usually call viruses. Those living cells are themselves cancerous, and will take tumorous root wherever in your gut they may come to rest. They are armed, moreover, with powerful biochemical defences which will keep them safe from marauding phagocytes and the instruments of your immune systems. All my life, you see, I have tried to serve the ideals of my father, learning to protect the body against such enemies as cancer; but all that I have learned is easy enough to turn on its head – in equipping cancer cells with protection against their enemy, the body, I faced a much easier task, aiding nature instead of trying to subvert it. Nor will your troubles end with the tumours themselves, for as they grow they will spew out more genetic material into your bloodstreams, which will infect your own cells and make them cancerous too.

"This added dimension of the problems which now face you is, I believe, an important one. It is unnecessary, of course, from the point of view of ensuring your death, but it confers a certain propriety on your fate. At the cellular level, you see, the cancers that will spring from your own flesh will be the daughters of your own cells. Tonight, although you have not devoured your children, you have set in train a chain of causation which will result in your being devoured, at least in sophisticated metaphor, by your children. I hope the logic of this parallel is not too convoluted for you.

"You may leave here now, if you wish. You, Dr Hess, are perfectly welcome to unleash all your knowledge and skill upon the task of trying to undo what has been done to you – and, if generosity moves you, you might even try to cure my mother. I am confident that you will not succeed; this is, after all, my field and I am sure that I could not save you. If you can heal yourself, then I will be pleased to acknowledge you a better physician than I. I think, on balance, I might prefer it if you tried. Simply to kill yourself, as an act of tormented euthanasia, might endorse the ancient opinion that whom the gods destroy, they first make mad, but I think we live in more civilized times nowadays, and you are a man of science, are you not? I would have less respect for you if you did not try to secure your salvation, even though we both know that the task is hopeless."

There is perhaps no better testament to the fact that we do live in less brutal times, and that our new Golden Age of biotechnology is to be preferred to the mythical Golden Age of heroes and blood feuds, than that Joseph Hess and Clementina Emden *did* go to their homes, without trying to do violence to their killers. Hess *did* try everything he could to save Clementina and himself, though it was all to no avail. They did not make public what had been done to them; shame prevented them from attempting even that meagre vengeance. And so the matter ended, with their deaths (which were relatively painless, by virtue of modern analgesics) and no blood-feud extended itself into future generations.

Aristide Emden became in the fullness of time a great man, regarded by all as a kind of saint, who followed up the victories won by his father in the Patent Wars, saved many a life, and made many others



more worth the living. His sister Alexia became his constant companion and helper, performing for him the same role she had performed for her father. Neither ever married, though there was nothing literally incestuous about their relationship. No Erinyes ever appeared to harry them, and if in the secret recesses of their minds they were troubled by guilt, they gave no sign of it. Hell withheld its Furies, at least until death delivered them up to its justice—and given that we live in such civilized times, how can we possibly believe that it did?



Brian Stableford, born in 1948, is *Interzone's* most popular contributor, according to our latest poll results (see "Inter-face"). An indefatigable producer of both fiction and non-fiction, his most recent novels are the interplanetary adventure *Invaders from the Centre* (New English Library, 1990; to be followed shortly by *The Centre Cannot Hold*) and, writing as "Brian Craig," the fantasies *Zaragoz* and *Plague Daemon* (G. W. Books, 1989 and 1990). He is also at work on a major new trilogy of sf novels for his hardcover publisher, Simon & Schuster Ltd.

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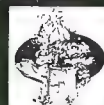
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Trilogies trilogies promises promises. Slip slip cup cup lip lip. Shaw Shaw. First there was *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986), elated and bounteous and fresh. The worlds it bridged were fresh, the voice of Bob Shaw in the telling of the tale was fresh and clear and radiant. (This reviewer's response can be found in *Interzone* 17.) Then came *The Wooden Spaceships* (1988), which sagaciously sidestepped the orthodoxy rituals (and circular quest splits) endemic to the second volumes of most trilogies (this reviewer's response appears in *Interzone* 25, accompanied by a long, arguably loony riff on the claim that Trilogies are at one level of analysis identical to Churches). And now we have *The Fugitive Worlds* (Gollancz, £12.95), still told in clear, still neat and courteous, still radiant with the author's love for his creation (when he remembers to give it a glance); but bored bored bored stiff.

Here is one of the good bits. Young Toller Maraquine, grandson of the Toller Maraquine whose craggy neurasthenic wanderlust powered the earlier volumes, is taking part in an expedition from Overland back to Land. The fleet has climbed up the hourglass of air connecting the two planets and has reached the halfway point, where the pilots must invert their balloons for the descent. At this point Shaw halts the tale for a paragraph so that Toller can take a look around him.

Superimposed on each planet, and similarly lit from the side, were the other ships of the fleet.... arcs of white condensation from their lateral jets complementing the global cloud patterns thousands of miles below. And embracing the spectacle was the frozen luminous panoply of the universe – the circles and spirals and streamers of silver radiance, the fields of brilliant stars with blue and white predominant, the silent-hovering comets and the darting meteors.

In this passage one hears – faintly and fading – the music of the spheres, the infinitesimal whisper of the Bang; the voice of a creator in love (however briefly) with the world. Very soon, it is gone.

Very soon, we find ourselves trudging through the heart gravel of a world without afflatus, a world abandoned by its namer. This is not to decry the application of certain skills; Shaw is too proficient and too conscientious not to supply *The Fugitive Worlds* with the kicks and turns of his craft. Young Toller Maraquine differs from his grandfather mainly through what one has learned to call the anxiety of influence – his fear that he is a golem of the sire, and his need to establish his own identity through some healing swerve from type – and Shaw does a responsible job of drawing him in these terms. Young Toller reads persuasively as a classic depressive, a

man of unwilling but compulsive introspections who can only escape the ghosts of the old Toller within him if there is something to do; but who finds himself lovably incapable of articulating any “unmanly” complexities of motive to his intimates or his staff. If Shaw himself feels twinges of an anxiety of influence – and if this anxiety bears the name of C.S. Forester, the creator of Horatio Hornblower – there is nothing for him to do but bear them. By 1990, at the end of a century which has seen the publication of several hundred million words of popular literature, it is hardly remarkable that an aura of belatedness seems to accompany any attempt to create action models of the Hero. Of these models, Hornblower is just about the most attractive going, and young Toller is a worthy get.

But the tale he captains soon begins to lose its precious air, sinks (as we've said) slowly into the gravel, grinds to a sad halt of the imagination. The first volumes had been driven by a kind of cosmogonic romancing of the old trope and gaudy dance of space opera; but *The Fugitive Worlds* shows almost nothing of that afflatus, that breath of creative love. The bones remain, and Shaw is finely professional in his manner of jiggling them; but it is, all the same, a melancholy fall. Toller's trip to Land, which Shaw tells in deft but alienated spasms of narrative, revolves around his obsessive love for a spoiled cockteaser princess whose disappearance causes him to stumble onto a vast AI-cum-stargate floating halfway between the worlds, both of which are due to be destroyed at the moment it turns itself on, allowing the planet Dussarra, which has just now appeared out of interstellar darkness, to jump hoop into a new universe and thereby escape a galaxy-crushing explosion caused by the knotting of Ropes of superdense matter from the Big Bang, the advancing wavefront of which is only a couple of hundred years upstream from Land and Overland and Toller at this very moment. O heck, what to do.

Toller thinks fast, kidnaps a telepathic Dussarran named Divivvidiv who lives in a Flash Gordon castle in the middle of the great (but talkative) stargate, takes him in his wooden

spaceship to the invading planet where the spoiled princess is being held captive, rescues her, starts a revolution with the aid of dissident Dussarrans, returns by instantaneous mind-bus to Overland to enact a clever wheeze that just might unbalance the stargate between the worlds whose name is Xa and who continues to complain about being a stargate. And so on. Olaf Stapledon it ain't. We will not reveal the final boil of the pot, except to say that Toller does finally – 200 pages late – see that the princess is rotten silly; and that the universe of the trilogy is definitely exited. And the afflatus of its beginning turns to ash, which Bob Shaw shakes from his heels.

So – unfortunately – do we.

We come to Kim Newman, writing as Jack Yeovil (English for Serftown), and to “his” second novel, *Drachenfels* (GW Books, £4.99), one of a series of sharecropper texts written to fit into the Warhammer fantasy games floor-universe, and copyrighted by Games Workshop Ltd, who own the world. Prefabbed out of standardized plot-bites (or dominoes) that tend to topple into speedline-riffs because its author seems to have written the thing in a following gale without slowing down to dock, *Drachenfels* manages to become, before it crashes, something of a tour de force. But what is original to Newman in the book, and what depends upon the floor-universe for contour and *donnée*, this reviewer does not know, cannot work out, and is clearly not meant ever to understand. Assuming that the Warhammer floor-universe is *describable* (or else how could Games Workshop Ltd claim to own it), the absence of any guide to this iron cage of copyrighted premise must be deliberate. Except for a map of The Old World which comprises a kind of endpaper (and in which “The Old World” so closely resembles the Ruritania post-catastrophe fantasy Europes featured in the sword-and-sorcery tales of writers like Michael Moorcock that it surely could not itself be owned), there is nothing about *Drachenfels* which bespeaks a corporate hand. Indeed, only one element of premise seems easily apparent to the reader – the restriction of the non-

Heart Gravel

John Clute

human cast to Tolkien-maggots – and that is a premise whose conceptual vacuity must preclude its being intrinsic to a copyrighted fantasy game. So whatever the secret of Warhammer is, it remains safely beyond the reviewer's grasp.

But ignorance can be bliss. We enter *Drachenfels* without premise or premonition, and after a spluttering Prologue (in which an assemblage of type-cast humans and fey-bites from Tolkien and one Barbie-vampire beards a Dark Lord named Drachenfels in his lair and defeats him, a defeat we take on trust because the text does a fade at the crucial moment, leaving us in some kind of suspense) we find ourselves in a thoroughly engaging drama. The young hero responsible for slaying Drachenfels in the Prologue now wishes, twenty or so years later, to restage the great event as a play to be performed before the crowned heads of um not-Europe at Castle Drachenfels itself; to do so, he extracts from debtors' prison Detlef Sierck, a portly young playwright whose talents are as considerable as his vanity, and sets him to work. A cast of actors soon assembles, along with all the survivors of the Prologue, and the whole crew hies to Drachenfels, where dark doings are afoot. Newman shows very considerable skill in differentiating these assorted sloughs of folk and non-folk and thespian, most of whom he manages to start killing off fairly soon to clear the air, but at no point in *Drachenfels* is he allowed to concentrate for more than a few hurtling pages on any one of them alone. Even so, characters do take shape. Detlef himself and the sweet-faced vamp-vampire Genevieve Dieudonné take on novelistic depth; and several of the extras can be recognized by the sound they make in the dark. It all ends in a staged play with perhaps too many characters emoting too shrilly, like a fugue of teapots, and with too many dangling story-bits coming together at once to twirl the oiled moustaches of the plot into a crash ending; but the ride has been swift, literate, funny.

Two things in particular. It's clear that Newman has based the entire jeu on some film or other (he has apparently acknowledged a 1930s musical plus John Ford's *Stagecoach* – though this reviewer himself preferred to detect, in some of its play-is-reality subtleties, hints of Ingmar Bergman's *The Magician*, an awful but strangely gripping film which is also about a performance which becomes the thing itself); and that this parodic subtext could be seen as an enabling commentary on the relationship between *Drachenfels* and Warhammer. Second, it might be noted how condignly the whole plot – in which actors play protagonists who are themselves in turn, it must be assumed, face-masks for the

fantasy gamers who play Warhammer – manages to acknowledge its relationship to the owned world, while at the same time asserting a final freedom. After all, the world of the imagination, in the end, is free. In the end. Isn't it.

APynchon note. *Vineland* (Little Brown, \$19.95; Secker & Warburg, £14.95) has come into the world, on the cusp of 1990, without benefit of proofs to hoard, advance copies to study for trace-marks of Inferno. It is a novel. It will be loved by some and dismissed by others. Those who love it will taste the coils of interregnum in its refusal to face past 1984 into the second term of Mr Reagan (I loved it); those who dismiss it will find the paranoid linkages of its plot either trivial or dumb, the nostalgia it seems to express for the 1960s simply reflecting the middle-agedness of its author, over 50 now, no surprise the axons are beginning to sputter and fail, the old Pynchon aping the abyssal melancholy of his prime, *Vineland* repeating *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) as farce. But maybe that is only to say that Pynchon knows whereof it is possible, at the moment, to speak. *Vineland* is a tale of the time, which is a time of waiting. It is about the badlands, the vertigo-inducing spasm-wracked decorticated American human heart caught in the entrails of a rat-trap cusp no kairos can illuminate. It is about the exhaustion of those who wait. It is also an extraordinarily funny book.

Zoyd Wheeler has gone to earth in *Vineland*, a small city in northern California, and until 1984 he has been safe, though monitored. A clan of Thanatoids or living dead also marks time in *Vineland*, mirroring the belatedness of his condition, the only time kept being the tick-tock ageing of his meat-puppet body. Suddenly the old world begins to connect him in again, like a torture deferred. The tale is complex, though it can be traced through; but this is only a note.

Suffice it that Zoyd has long ago lost his wife Frenesi to the ownership of those who bought the 1960s, who turned the hippies into operatives; and that now Frenesi has dodged even Brock Vond, the owner-rep who had had the run of her body for more than a decade. Vond now wants to obtain her daughter Prairie, who has been raised by Zoyd. Zoyd sends her into hiding, and himself disappears for most of the rest of the book, most of which comprises a dense and skittish epistemological probing of Frenesi's long irradiation in time's net, in "the crimes behind the world, the thousand bloody arroyos in the hinterlands of time that stretched somberly inland from the honky-tonk coast of Now." At the end, for a moment, Vond is defeated – more accurately, he is annulled by

a government diktat – and children are seen playing, families gathering at dawn or dusk around their RVs, Zoyd shrugging off a long-anticipated meet with Frenesi; a moment of peace most precious to flotsam. And the book is done. It has not stepped over. It is about waiting. It has not trespassed forward, through time's arroyos, to the oil-slicked coast.

Wise wise *Vineland*, so to stop.

Sagas and Secret Histories

Paul J. McAuley

Patrick Harpur's novel *Mercurius* (Macmillan, £14.95) isn't exactly sf, but it is a secret history, a double narrative about alchemy and psychoanalysis (the secret history of physics and chemistry, and the secret history of the self) that plunges deep into the darkness beneath our quotidian world. Bookended by an authorial introduction purporting to explain the origin of the journals on which the narratives are based, and copious notes expanding upon esoteric references to Jungian theories and the history of alchemy, and barnacled with footnotes and interrupted by diagrams, it is the very model of a post-modernist novel, which is to say it is overly conscious that it is a novel, and of the narrative tricks it must employ. The reader should know, then, to approach it with caution, for although every word counts, we cannot trust the narrators. As in texts left by the great alchemists, nothing is quite what it seems: even the name used by one narrator is assumed, and while he says that he "will reveal more than has ever been revealed before, more than I should (as much as I dare)," it is what is left out that is significant.

The two alternating narratives work from beginning and end to the same explosive revelations. One consists of the journal of a rural clergyman in the bleak 1950s, who is attempting to produce the Philosophers' Stone in the basement of his vicarage. As he tends the vessel where his great alchemical experiment slowly cooks, its changes and fluxes working on him as much as on themselves, villagers mutter darkly about his relationship with the pregnant young woman he has taken on as housekeeper, a marriage goes bad, the squire's son exercises *droit de seigneur* on local girls and terrorizes the village with his motorcycle gang, and the squire threatens to cut down the local wood. Interleaved with this is the journal of the author's girlfriend, or so we are told, who has fled to the country to avoid a nervous breakdown and rented out the vicarage where, thirty years

before, the alchemical experiment seemingly ended in disaster. The young woman finds the clergyman's journal and tries to unravel the nature and circumstances of his experiment, the relationships of the reclusive survivors, and the illuminations it sheds upon her own life...or does she? Tricky things, these po-mo novels, and Harpur tacks on an ending that according to the reader's prejudices either by neat sleight of hand recasts all that has gone before, or, by cheating, topples the whole house of cards.

Difficult and densely scholarly, *Mercurius* is sometimes too obscure for its own good, and savoured with rather too much *Cold Comfort Farm*-style misery (to be fair, Harpur tips a wink with a mention of Mary Webb's *Precious Bane*, the object of *Cold Comfort Farm*'s parody, but parts still resemble the *Archers* in a bad opium dream). Nevertheless, it is a finely crafted suspense novel of ideas, recommended to all who like their mysteries to be deep and dark, and don't mind conjuring tricks.

Neil Ferguson's first book was a collection of picaresque short stories all revolving around American bars; his second a kind of semiological detective novel. *Double Helix Fall* (Abacus, £3.99) combines elements of its predecessors with conventions of sf dystopias to produce a narrative that in some ways is too intelligent for its own good. It's set in America after the millennium, where society is rigidly stratified and chance outlawed. Life is deemed to exist only in the womb, so that birth is death, and life in the womb determines everything in the afterlife, a neat elimination of free will whose implications Ferguson details with gusto. Everyone has their place in society and must not move from it. Even their names reflect their status: from the President, Ammarie Bernier, to those at the bottom, like Vergil Wyman. Only the Zappers live outside the law, taunting the cops by performing the richly symbolic double helix fall manoeuvre in their flying machines. Like Harpur's *Mercurius*, there's a double plot, turning on the escape of the President's daughter from the White House soap opera, and the escape of Gottlieb Sollyheim from his luxurious prison, where he's been incarcerated for fourteen years because he is the originator of the dystopia's underpinning philosophy and he knows the truth about it.

Although the pace is glacial, although the beginning is weighed down with huge dollops of undigested fact (that's the problem with sf secret histories: before you can get down to mystery you have to map out your fictional reality – it's so much simpler when that reality is all around you), although the narratives are clogged with a dozen

subplots whose resolutions are left dangling, there's much to enjoy along the way. Ferguson's tactile prose is finely polished and dense with irony (that saving grace of British sf), allusive, street-smart and knowing, with more than one homage to Philip K. Dick tipped in – there are garrulous sky taxis, a robot that thinks it's a human detective, a braindamaged bum who speaks only in lyrical quotations (here from Captain Beefheart: in Dick it would be Wagner) which act as zen-like parables. Slowly, the narratives converge on a desert bar, and the inevitable series of revelations. And it's this part which is weakest, for we've known all along that the secret history of the dystopia is our own reality, and that is all we get. Even a splendid joke soap-opera revelation can't quite cover this gap as plot lines snarl up, the robot detective discovers it's an atheist, and everything ends suspended in flight.

If secret histories are vertical explorations of the known world, then sagas are horizontal explorations of worlds far wilder and grander, explorations that sprawl all over the place. Prone and garrulous as all get-out is Robert Silverberg's *The Queen of Springtime* (Gollancz, £13.95), which continues the colourful Sci-Fantasy saga started in *At Winter's End*. It's set in Earth's distant future, after bombardment by death-stars destroyed four of the five ancient races and their high civilization, and started a new ice age. The ice age is over and the People, who survived in cocoons thanks to the intervention of the vanished human race, have inherited the Earth. Or so they think, for they must still contend with the only ancient race to have survived the death-stars, the insect-like *hijk*-folk, and they must also come to terms with the breakdown of the tribes of the cocoons, the rise of new orders. There's neatly done palace intrigue, a number of zipless fucks (and a kind of mystical safe-sex merging of souls – portrayed in terms of tender adolescent fantasy), travel across strange lands, heroic battles. In short, an effortless widescreen panorama epic (a tribute to Silverberg's agile imagination and skilful manipulation of genre clichés) high in colour and low in intellectual albedo. It glows but it does not shine.

Silverberg quit sf in the Seventies in a well-publicized spat because he was producing a string of fine, literary sf novels (and *Shadrach in the Furnace* or *Dying Inside*, to name but two, are certainly fine sf) and no one was paying any attention. He returned with *Lord Valentine's Castle*, a colourful Sci-Fantasy saga which made piles of money, and presumably, a point. To which nobody paid any attention. And Silverberg's been making the same

point ever since: but watching him churn this stuff out is like watching Elizabeth David or James Beard work behind a MacDonald's counter. We need something better from him than this, even if we don't deserve it.

M.J. Engh's *Wheel of the Winds* (Grafton, £3.99) is likewise an old-fashioned kind of saga, harkening back to *Mission of Gravity* by way of *The Left Hand of Darkness* (take these comparisons as shorthand, rather than at face-value). Two humans have landed on a small tidelocked planet to study its weather. One has been killed and eaten by a primitive tribe; the other must retrieve equipment left on the darkside face of the world and signal for rescue, and two human-like natives (from whose point of view the story is told) become his helpers in his mission to the unknown darkside. Which, like most sagas, is all there needs to be of the plot, except for incidental complications. But Engh, a writer of formidable technique, wants to do something else with it, and *Wheel of the Winds* is as much a comedy of manners as an epic saga, revelations about the world and all it contains secondary to internal revelations.

The trouble is not that the story is told from the point of view of the aliens (the human's speech is reported, until he finds his voice at the end, with electrifying effect), but that the aliens are too busy being superior to ever notice anything or be really changed by it. We learn all we need to know about the players, but little about the stage – even though the plot requires that the players traverse it twice. Engh cleverly reveals her world and her aliens by misdirection and allusion – there's hardly an expository lump that's not been stirred smooth – but nothing is ever revealed to her characters. Fractious, conceited and haughty, they girle the world (and incidentally save it) and remain more or less unmoved. So did this reader.

Prentice Alvin (Legend, £12.95 hardback, £6.95 paperback) continues Orson Scott Card's five-part *Tales of Alvin Maker*, the story of the getting of wisdom of a kind of messiah figure in an alternate eighteenth-century America where magic is abroad in the land. It's a work in which secret history alternates with saga, and in this volume the secret history to be plumbed is Alvin's own nature, which he must learn before he is true master of his powers. It's a mystical apprenticeship paralleling his apprenticeship to a blacksmith, ending when he turns a plough of iron into gold, having conquered agents of his adversary, the Unmaker, and realizing his mission with the help of Peggy the Torch – who, it turns out, has been magically protecting him through the previous two volumes. That's a touch typical of

Card's economical storytelling – *The Tale of Alvin Maker* is an epic, but it is tidy. It does not sprawl. Nor is it simple, and we will have to await the final volumes before proper exegesis can begin.

Sufficient to note that Card's writing is informed by a strong moral framework that is reflected in the basis of Alvin's power (that all atoms know their place) as well as in the small-town society in which he serves his dual apprenticeship (that all people should know their place, and cleave to it happily). And also to note that overt echoes of Mormonism ring here and there – the agents of the Unmaker indulge in a kind of polygamous rape of slave women, for instance (mainstream Mormons strongly condemn polygamists), and on the horizon gleams a shining city. Alvin's journey towards it continues, as they say, in further volumes.

Rich Tepper Wendy Bradley

Mind control and dead bats loom large in *Grass*, Sheri S. Tepper's latest hardback (Bantam, £12.95). The heroine combats a sinister religious cult, the repressive influence of Catholicism, several varieties of vicious alien, a rigid aristocratic code and a manipulative nuclear family to save humanity from an horrendous plague – and moreover to break free in search of her own, albeit slightly copped-out, happy ending. Rich, satisfying, strange.

Tepper also has in paperback a horror novel, *Still Life* (Corgi, £2.99), with such a grip I was at one point literally trying to read it with my eyes shut! It's a modern American tale with a clever narrative structure, told from a female student's and male lecturer's viewpoints, and a plot to do with paintings of death and horror coming true. Shame it wimps out so badly at the end.

Esther M. Friesner has no such problem in *Druid's Blood* (Headline, £3.50). Imagine if Britain had been a pagan, druidical country in Queen Victoria's day and Victoria had chosen a certain Dr Weston, companion of a famous Baker Street detective, as her consort one Beltane eve, and Lord Kitchener summoned Kali in an attempt to usurp the throne... A clever and original what-if, and funny enough even without the Dick Van Dyke cockney wot peeps aht in ploices, guv.

Jane Saint and the Backlash: The Further Travels of Jane Saint and The Consciousness Machine is Josephine Saxton's latest from The Women's Press (£4.95). I didn't think I liked Jane Saint and her faux-naïf travels through the subconscious and its platonic

archetypes, but this one I enjoyed hugely. There's an aphorism on every page and a cast of splendid characters including a glorious gorgon, a salty virgin and a Yorkshire witch who's my role model for the Third Age.

In *The Coachman Rat* (Robinson, £4.95; Carroll & Graf, \$13.95) David Henry Wilson rectifies the speciesist bias in "Cinderella" by looking at whatever did happen to the eponymous rat. Sympathetic, credible(ish) and well told, although I wonder whether Cinderella would describe being burned at the stake after watching your spouse beheaded as quite falling into the prescribed category of happy-ever-afters.

And finally, lycanthrope's corner. *Wolf Dreams* by Michael D. Weaver (New English Library, £5.99) is a good solid trilogy-in-one-volume about a ninth-century battlemistress who is afflicted with the curse – no, not that one, the curse of being a werewolf. This world, Midguard, is coming adrift from the other worlds of the pagan gods under the growing influence of the "cult of the one god." The werewolf theme is underused and the third "volume" especially seems curiously pointless: the heroine, Thyri, never does anything terribly effective with her runesword and her magical training. Viewpoint problems, too, with the "I" character, Gerald, turning up as a very minor character in the plot and yet hijacking our sympathies at the end.

It's miles better, though, than *The Wolf's Hour* by Robert R. McCammon (Grafton, £12.95), a simple tale of a British secret agent and part-time werewolf taking on S & M Nazis in World War II. Lots of lurid descriptions that set that little voice in the back of the head objecting "surely he would have been dead long before he tore his face off?" Not for the literal-minded or weak-stomached.

Nuts and Bolts

For some reason there's a lot of gritty nuts-and-bolts hard sf around at the moment, set in realistic near-future space habitats where the plumbing fails and personal stereotypes get on your nerves. In *Farside Cannon* by Roger MacBride Allen (Orbit/Futura, £3.99) the good guys are geologists exiled to a depressing base on the far side of the moon and the villain is a multinational corporation that wants to place a large asteroid into a dangerously low Earth orbit so that it can be mined. It's good fun, but I find it hard to imagine the company getting permission to do the move in the first place (why not break it up in a very high orbit?) and everything seems too easy for the conspirators. It's funny in places as well

as being fashionably green, but the issue is never in doubt and the characters barely believable. I like the idea of a one-way equatorial highway on the moon: if you keep to the right speed you can go round the Moon in 28 days on solar power, non stop.

Reach, by Edward Gibson (Macdonald, £12.95) is the first sf I have read by someone who's actually been in space (a Skylab astronaut, he is billed on the cover as having "spent more time in space than any other American"). Something nasty has grabbed an astronaut in the outer solar system and his buddies must find out what. The chapters all have one-word titles that give a hilarious feel to the contents page (I quote: "Clash blame challenge attack smother choose cooperate battle swallow squeeze enlighten torment communicate inform trek toddle examine disrupt ascend rendezvous dock contribute result escape polarize snooze condemn create offer flush confront arouse crave sever whisper press inter survive decide fall conform reach choke"), and I'm afraid the text suffers from something of the same problem, with its excess of snappy war-comic dialogue ("From here on I'm going to fly with a little old lady." "Speed, you mean...fly solo?" "Good idea. You gonna punch out?"). I was more interested in the author's attitudes than the story. He really does seem to believe in an Outward Urge that compels humans to explore beyond the horizon, the "Reach" of the title, and the kings of this High Frontier are the astronauts and test pilots of the manned spaceflight programme. They are delayed – but never frustrated – in their purpose by Mission Control, software authors, bureaucrats, most journalists and all politicians. There is a lot of dangerous flying in this book.

Exactly the opposite is true of Allen Steele's *Orbital Decay* (Legend/Century, £14.95) which stars a bunch of unruly aged-hippy blue-collar workers building a space station. (The title is, as you may guess, something of a pun). The bad guys this time are the US government and a major aerospace contractor setting out to tap everyone's phones. I like this book even though the men in the white space helmets find it absurdly easy to get away with their good deeds. It's refreshing to find some "hard" sf in which the meek, or at any rate the working class, inherit the worlds. The only character in *Orbital Decay* who bears any resemblance to the Right Stuff space pilots of *Reach* is an insane militarist who believes in America's manifest destiny to conquer the stars. He ends up in hospital.

There's something very old-fashioned about all three of the above novels. The culture and style of the future is very much like the present – only the technology has changed. It's most noticeable in *Orbital Decay*,

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which is populated almost entirely by refugees from the early 1970s, bearded Vietnam vets who wear jeans, denim jackets with the sleeves cut off and baseball caps, smoke a lot of dope, ride Harley Davidson's, read Robert Heinlein, G. Harry Stine and L. Ron Hubbard, watch reruns of *Star Trek* and listen interminably to the Grateful Dead – all this in a book set over twenty years in the future. But even Edward Gibson seems archaic at times with his insistence on using feet and pounds in astronomical measurements. No wonder NASA keeps on going over budget.

Joe Haldeman's **The Long Habit of Living** (NEL, £12.95) is a little different, if only because his 21st century is dominated by British science rather than Japanese or American. A secret medical foundation offers a cure for old age, that restores health for about ten or twelve years. The snag is that it costs a million pounds and the patient has to sign over all his or her assets to the foundation or certain approved charities. (This scheme is meant to have been dreamed up by a British Labour MP in order to destroy inherited wealth). So the story is set in an underworld of the super-rich, who every decade have to rebuild their fortunes from scratch to get the money to pay for the next ten years of health. The book is cleverly and enjoyably written, using occasional illustrations (the author's own, I assume) and supposed extracts from databases to give the impression of a style reaching towards hypertext. There is a full quota of decadent cyberpunk urban landscapes, a trip out to the asteroids and some obligingly cheeky artificial intelligences. However, for this reader at any rate, the story does not quite sustain the treatment. Just in passing, one of the characters repeats the old saw that life prolongation would be economically disastrous because of the resulting population explosion. Surely this is only true if the "extra" old people are in ill health and need caring for? An extended youth as described here would reduce poverty by increasing the proportion of productive working people in the economy. And of course the birth rate would go down because the proportion of fertile women would fall.

Tides of Light by Gregory Benford (Gollancz, £13.95) is a space-operatic sequel to the author's *Great Sky River*. A small human community fleeing through space becomes involved in a war between the machine intelligences that wrecked their home planet and some immense arthropod cyborgs using cosmic strings to break up their intended destination. The combatants hardly notice that they are wiping out the human race; they seem to regard planet-based life much as the government of some South American country might think of the inhabitants of a

shanty town they intend to bulldoze. Any planet-dwellers worth saving would have got off their backsides and got themselves a decent job out in space somewhere. The whole idea of this series is that the humans are insignificant, yet these ones carry with them two tablets of imperishable material known as the "Legacies" bearing untranslated inscriptions that everyone seems to attach some great significance to. I haven't read *Great Sky River*, so perhaps we're already supposed to know what the inscriptions are, but I sincerely hope they don't turn out to be the Ten Commandments or the US Declaration of Independence.

The Man-Kzin Wars (Orbit, £3.50) contains three stories from Larry Niven, Poul Anderson and Dean Ing. The Niven is a reprint of "The Warriors," the story that introduced the Kzin (large cat-like aliens who feature in many of Niven's "Known Space" stories). The other two are new tales set in Niven's imagined universe. Whenever I read a sentence which uses the collective singular "Man" instead of "People" (or even "Humanity" if you must) I reach for my ideological soundness pills. The overtones of a title like "Tales from the Human-Kzin Wars" would be quite different. And yes, it is "Man," or rather "men," who do the fighting and of course "Man" turns out to be a rougher, tougher son-of-a-bitch species than "Kzin." This is the sort of stuff we used to read in *Analog* back when it wasn't even called *Analog* yet. Anderson sneaks a few women into a rather confused narrative about a small party of humans in a fast space ship dodging their Kzinti enemies around the planets and moons of an (apparently) uninhabited solar system; while Dean Ing dumps his mild-mannered human protagonist on his own into an artificial environment in a force-field dome, where he has a limited time to set up a defence against the Kzin from what he can find. He then neatly subverts the genre by recruiting Kzin women who are fed up with being treated as semi-sentient, cuddly breeders as in Niven.

I'm running out of space here so I'll do a quick round-up of the rest, ranging from the most to the least enjoyable. **A Talent for War** by Jack McDevitt (Sphere, £3.50): I know it's naughty to make comparisons but this highly enjoyable tale of some slightly shady far-future amateur archaeologists trying to piece together the exact circumstances of a war that occurred a couple of centuries in their past reminded me of Mike Resnick's *The Dark Lady*. Greg Bear, **Tangents** (Gollancz, £12.95): a collection containing the original version of *Blood Music*. I liked "Sleepside Story" and "Dead Run" – a *Twilight Zone*-type plot treatment about a truck driver who delivers souls to Hell.

James White, **Code Blue Emergency**

(Orbit, £3.50): a nurse trainee (classification DCNF) turns up at the Sector General space hospital, thoroughly wrecks everything but turns out to have hidden talents in the end. Undemanding fun. John Brosnan, **War of the Sky Lords** (Gollancz, £12.95): various violent adventures in a world wrecked by genetic warfare – sequel to *The Sky Lords*, with an opening for another sequel at the end. Arthur C. Clarke, **Tales from Planet Earth** (Legend, £12.95): short stories from 1949 to 1987, including such well-known tales as "If I Forget Thee, Oh Earth." The only otherwise uncollected story is "On Golden Seas." Ben Bova, **Peacekeepers** (Mandarin, £3.50): the Peacekeepers are a sort of police force who have been given control of both US and Soviet orbital defence forces in order to prevent war between nation states. They are not permitted to oppose mercenaries, terrorists and drug-dealers; however, they provide covert support for those who do. The book is made up of a series of short, violent incidents set in colourful and out-of-the-way locations. This episodic structure makes it read more like a TV series than a novel. I liked it more than most of Bova's fiction, but that isn't saying much.

Rama II by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee (Gollancz, £12.95): this is pretty standard stuff. Another alien space habitat arrives in the Solar System a generation after the first Rama. An expedition is set up, the personalities of the investigators are briefly established in the first few chapters, they travel to Rama, investigate it, and one by one die horribly, betrayed by what they bring with them rather than what they find there. There seems to be some Catholic spine to Clarke's familiar vague mysticism, and presumably this is Gentry Lee's contribution. As we are told more than once, the Ramans do everything in threes, so there will be a sequel.

With Fate Conspire, Mike Shupp (Headline, £3.99): a visit to some favourite old sf plots. A Vietnam veteran is plunged into a future in which "Teeps" (telepaths) are treated as Jews were in Europe not so long ago – tolerated for their usefulness, never allowed a full part in the state and always in danger of pogrom. The country in which they live is losing a war, so they try to fix things by changing history, with all the traditional confusing results. There are beautiful women, a few time paradoxes and a subplot about coffee. Samantha Lee, **Childe Rolande** (Orbit, £4.50): a very strange book set in an Alba (i.e. Scotland) ruled by women. If it hadn't been for the name of the author I'd have thought of this as a male version of a feminist dystopia, all mother goddesses, human sacrifices and penis envy. It's rather gross, with a lot of gory detail

of obscene rites. The writing occasionally jumps into Scots then irritatingly falls back into standard English. The plot reminds this reader of Sheri S. Tepper's far superior *The Gate to Women's Country*, which has a similar twist.

Christopher Rowley, *The Vang, The Military Form – A Close Encounter of the Fatal Kind* (Legend, £3.50): a standard-issue Horrid Parasitical Thing from Space Opera Central Casting turns up on a spaceship and almost takes over a human colony. I find it hard to get into a novel whose first sentence is: "The desolation was as endless as the universe itself." I disliked this book very much indeed.

(Ken Brown)

Anthologies

The past year or so has provided us with the opportunity to review a surprising number of UK-published all-original sf/fantasy anthologies. Best so far of the sf-leaning collections was probably David Garnett's *Zenith*, whilst in the fantasy field the refreshing zest of *Ignorant Armies* (edited by David Pringle) made it a clear winner. Another recent contender is *Tarot Tales* (Legend, £5.95) edited by Rachel Pollack and Caitlin Matthews. Each of their 16 by-invitation-only authors based a story on a hand of Tarot cards. The results are mixed.

The writers fall into two broad camps – familiar names from the sf/fantasy field; and others who, according to the biographical notes, have interests in various esoteric disciplines and the Tarot in particular. Rachel Pollack, however, is both an accomplished sf writer and an authority on the Tarot, and her story, "Knower of Birds," can serve as a benchmark of sorts for the anthology. It's a surreal tale, written in a deceptively simple style which makes you feel that there's something significant here that a single read will not reveal. Unfortunately, that first reading fails to generate the enthusiasm required to tackle it a second time.

In this collection at least, the strongest stories come from the more established writers. Best of the bunch by far is "The Wind Box," by IZ discovery Scott Bradfield. It's an intense, gripping tale of alienation and earthquakes set in a less-than-transcendental California. Sheila Finch (British but resident in the US) also uses a West Coast setting well in "Rembrandt's of Things Past." The title sets the tone of the story, which is an amusing confection of art, therapy, and that old fantasy favourite – the devil. New York writer Peter Lamborn Wilson (remember him from IZ 18?) gives us "Cave Pirates of the Hollow Earth," a cleverly-balanced

tale of fiction-within-fiction, with a satisfying resolution.

There's a preponderance of British contributions, though. Recommended for being short, succinct and clever is Garry Kilworth's "Snake Dreams," a tale full of South American jungle menace. M. John Harrison's "The Horse of Iron" has an enigmatic protagonist who uses Tarot cards as a form of train timetable, to direct not just his rail travels but his life. As you'd expect of Harrison, it's resolutely weird, yet the fractured images lodge powerfully in the mind like fragments of an unexplained nightmare. Not so successfully, Gwyneth Jones retells the Psyche legend in "The Lovers," which takes itself very seriously but is frankly tedious. Michael Moorcock's "Hanging the Fool" is a much smoother read, but, for all its carefully crafted period feel, this tale of feckless Edwardian globetrotters amounts to little more than a distraction.

Storm Constantine's "As It Flows to the Sea" is a lacklustre space opera with serious plot deficiencies. Josephine Saxton's "The Emigration" is potentially more interesting – a feminist tale of oppressed women who gradually build a shared dream-world out of their fantasies. It might have worked much better if Saxton had kept her characters on her grim, future Earth instead of improbably indenturing them on a (not very) alien world. In direct contrast to Saxton's feminism, American Jacqueline Lichtenberg's "False Prophecy" mixes drugs, fortune-telling and true love in an unlikely story plucked straight from the annals of Mills & Boon.

Perhaps the most disappointing of the stories which come from writers outside the established fantasy field is "The Persistence of False Memory" by Robert Irwin. The story has a convincing medieval feel to it, and starts intriguingly enough with a cardinal about to meet a philosopher who has a device that can "infinitely rescue the Saracens from their heretical errors and hasten the Second Coming of the Redeemer." Halfway through the viewpoint shifts uncomfortably to the philosopher, and thereafter the story loses its way.

R. J. Stewart's "The Devil's Picture-book" is an amusing but lightweight story featuring the devil and an enterprising demon. And then there are the stories that, for different reasons, don't really qualify as stories in the conventional sense at all: Caitlin Matthews's "The Goddess of the Land" (a piece of invented Celtic mythology); John Matthews's "The Tenth Muse" (a parable); and Cherry Gilchrist's "The Ship of the Night" (two dreams strung together for no good reason).

At first glance, *Tarot Tales* looks appealing enough. The basic idea is interesting; the book itself is both

handsomely packaged and reasonably priced; and it contains excellent reproductions of the particular Tarot cards (taken from an impressive variety of packs) which inspired the writers alongside every story. The problem is that too many of the stories fail to match the rest of the package.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

Fantasy, Etc.

There are some very unattractive worlds in this batch of fantasy books. In *Glitterspike Hall* by Mike Jefferies (Fontana, £6.99) we are in Gnarllesmyre, where Miresnare rules the city of Gor and the surrounding marshlands. Long ago he promised the hand of his eldest daughter (he has many daughters) to whoever brought a marsh-beast to defeat his own fearsome brute. The world has no redeeming features, either in its harsh physical features or in its savage society. This does make it difficult to identify with Marrimian's attempts to prove herself and to claim the throne of this drab land in her own right.

The world of *Wolf's Brother* by Megan Lindholm (Unwin, £6.99) is also inhospitable. However, the culture of the tribes is well researched and portrayed, reflecting the many layers of human experience. It is a sequel to *The Reindeer People* and continues the story of Tillu, now accepted by the tribe as their healer, and her strange son. Together they make their new home among the loves, rivalries and enmities of a society which lives in a cold and hostile environment.

Much more colourful is the medieval world of *The Harrowing of Gwynedd* (Legend, £6.95). Katherine Kynne has described this before in her *Deryni* books. Following the death of St. Camber there begins a harsh persecution of all those with magical powers. Camber's friends and heirs must find ways to protect their people in circumstances where magic is too perilous to use. Kurtz's world is an outstanding creation and the problems of her characters convincing.

Also convincing is the horse world of Mary Stanton's *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (Legend, £6.95). This is a sequel to *The Heavenly Horse from the Outermost West* (yes, the author does appear to love long titles). The son of Duchess and Dancer is now the stallion in the American West. He must leave the safety of Sweetwater Ranch, and the company of his brood mares, to rescue his parents who are lost in a limbo between earth and heaven. Stanton has again created much credible horse lore and this enables us to share the horses' experiences. In particular I was impressed with the frustrations and aspirations of the ranch work-

horses and the changed perceptions when Piper is ridden bareback and shares man's forward sight.

The world of David Eddings, however, is beginning to weary. In *The Sorceress of Darshiva* (Bantam, £12.95) Garion and his companions continue to search for his lost child. This is the ninth story about them, and there is little new to discover. The plot-line appears to be little more than an excuse to send them across the eastern continent and to spin out the story into another volume.

The Waking of Orthlund by Roger Taylor (Headline, £3.99) is the third of the "Chronicles of Hawklan." Only a few are left to oppose Dan Tor, but the pregnant queen has escaped and so has the healer Hawklan. They now have to warn the unsuspecting country of Rid-din and also Orthlund, where the people preparing for war find strange opposition. The description of the journey through the mountains passes is outstanding.

Caught in Crystal by Patricia C. Wrede (Futura, £3.50) is a feminist sword-and-sorcery novel. A woman is recalled to the sisterhood which she has left. The sisters are expert in both swordcraft and magic but a strange power is blighting their spells. Competent but unoriginal.

Azazel is a collection of stories by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, £10.95) which previously appeared in various magazines. It is also the name of a two-centimetre demon who is called upon to perform "miracles" for the friends of George Bitternut. Inevitably each miracle leads to disaster, and the friends are worse off than before (George's companion, the author, gets worried in case Azazel is asked to help him!). As a collection, these stories do suffer from having their main themes restated each time, and there is no room for any development of character or understanding. However their humour and ingenuity carry the day.

Through the Nightsea Wall by Otto Coontz (Methuen, £8.95) is aimed at the teenage market. A family drives into the American backwoods to join a friend who has inherited a plot of land. They are warned off the area, people disappear, strange lights are seen and stranger creatures are not quite seen. It is a fantasy/horror story with a twist, but the family bring their own problems, in particular a daughter suffering from leukaemia, and the two themes intertwine very sensitively.

(Phyllis McDonald)

YS OK

After finishing the first three volumes of Poul and Karen Anderson's *The King of Ys*, I was surprised to hear there was a fourth volume, wondering

if anything which followed the magnificently realized cataclysm at the end of the third could avoid being an anticlimax. I need not have worried. *The Dog and the Wolf* (Grafton, £4.50) is an excellent addition to the series, interweaving the fantasy elements with a fascinating and neglected episode from late Roman history, the Armorican revolt. The series as a whole will certainly find a place in my personal Dark Age Hall of Fame, and the Andersons are to be congratulated on re-working a powerful myth with which few will be familiar.

The few apparently include polymath John Brunner, who includes a reference to the disappeared city of Ys in *The Compleat Traveller in Black* (reissued last year by Mandarin, £3.50) – though none of the legendary characters used by the Andersons appear. Fans of the *Traveller in Black* will be pleased to have all five stories in one volume: not all will have been easily available before. On the whole, the first, "Imprint of Chaos," is still the best, but the standard of imagination throughout is high, going to support my contention that the best fantasy is written by those who also write a harder type of sf.

Gail Van Asten does herself no favours in the preface to *The Blind Knight* (Fontana, £2.99). She says that her first novel was born out of a profound love of medieval history, but I fear that what she really loves is historical romance, fantasy, and bodice-rippers. In sharp contrast to the Andersons, she seems to have gleaned information about the twelfth-century background largely from such sources, and the first half of the novel suffers badly from one's awareness of numerous minor howlers. As the novel progressed, I found it growing on me, and the conclusion, with the discovery of Arthur's tomb, is a good pastiche of the original Romances. It was also nice to read a cynically realistic (if anachronistic) re-appraisal of a saint, in this case Thomas a Beckett.

(Peter T. Garratt)

A Generator of Artistry

Brian Aldiss's *A Romance of the Equator* (Gollancz, £13.95) is subtitled *Best Fantasy Stories* and is the companion volume to *Man in His Time: Best Science Fiction Stories*. In his introduction, Aldiss refuses a definition of either category, so I'll supply one: *fantasy* is the imagination given form; *science fiction* is the intellect given form. Fantasy is a set of disparate visions formulated into a coherent story; science fiction derives a story from a set of proposals. Fantasy

is arbitrary, sf is systemic. They overlap – a fantasy plot must be logical, sf can be propelled by a vision, yet my suggested definitions explain the difference in approach mentioned by Aldiss.

Given the increased space of two books, some stories have migrated from earlier editions of *Best SF* to the new *Best Fantasy*, including "Old Hundredth" and "The Moment of Eclipse," but most were scattered through general Aldiss collections, and a few are collected for the first time. Many are classic, superbly written, powerful in imagery; some are elliptic, deliberately difficult to understand and harder to explain to those who think Aldiss has been moving away from sf in the last decade (which is the period from which most of the book is selected). The two dozen stories have no common theme, no repeated approach, no shared background except Aldiss's own mind. They're sharp and sassy like "Bill Carter Takes Over," or formless and disturbing as in "Lies!"; slyly humorous, melancholic, regretful, a book to be savoured story by story.

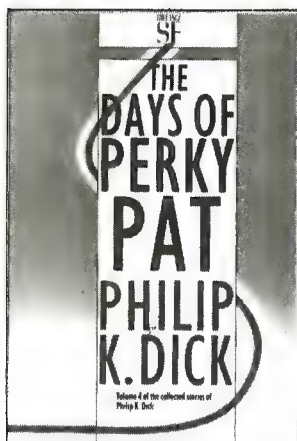
The same author's *Galaxies Like Grains of Sand* (VGSF, £2.99) is the 1979 edition, with a revised "Blighted Profile" and an excellent (also revised) introduction by Norman Spinrad which studies the stories in depth and as a thematic whole. The book is constructed from some of Aldiss's earliest works, each leading to the next by way of an expository interlude, the entire book designed as a sustained vision of one future. Although it includes some excellent stories (the much reprinted "Who Can Replace a Man?", the horrific "All the World's Tears"), it's clear Aldiss was still learning his craft. At times there's an unwarranted heaviness to the satire, the style is not quite focused, the names sound artificial; for example, the penultimate line of "Visiting Amoeba." But if Aldiss had yet to successfully satirize humanity, he was able to poke fun at types and institutions (see "Secret of a Mighty City"). Compare these two books, individual stories written thirty years apart: a generation of artwork from a generator of artistry.

(Ian Covell)

Also Received

Brian J. Frost's *The Monster With a Thousand Faces: Guises of the Vampire in Myth and Literature* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, \$13.95) gives a usefully comprehensive, if superficial, account of vampire fiction from Byron and Polidori to Ann Rice and Whitley Strieber. (DP)

SPRING BESTSELLERS FROM GOLLANCZ



THE DAYS OF PERKY PAT

Philip K. Dick

The fourth and penultimate volume of Dick's short stories includes 'The Mold of Yancy' which inspired the novel *THE PENULTIMATE TRUTH*, while the title story was the seed from which one of Dick's greatest works, *THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH*, later grew. Philip K. Dick is shown in his prime in this collection, writing stories which stand alongside novels like *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE* and *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*

5 April £13.95

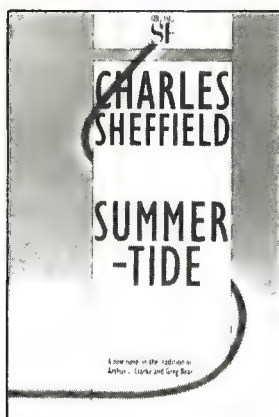


ASTOUNDING DAYS

Arthur C. Clarke

Arthur C. Clarke acquired his first copy of *ASTOUNDING STORIES* – the profoundly influential SF magazine of the Thirties and Forties – when he was 13. From then on, he was hooked, and in his autobiography he looks back over those days, reviewing the stories and the personalities that penned them with characteristic insight and good humour. 'An unexampled exercise in almost heavenly nostalgia... fascinating, since Clarke is incapable of being otherwise.' Isaac Asimov, *Observer*

5 April Paperback £4.99



SUMMERTIDE

Charles Sheffield

Set more than four thousand years in the future, *SUMMERTIDE* introduces a galaxy widely populated by humans and a variety of intelligent aliens, all of whom live in the shadow of the vanished race known only as the Builders, whose gigantic abandoned artifacts dominate known space. On the double-planet system of Opel and Quake (the former covered in water, the latter a desert) a variety of humans and aliens gather, ostensibly to witness Summertide – the annual tidal wave which sweeps across Opel. But this will be the most violent Summertide for 350,000 years: and may offer a way to find the Builders themselves... *SUMMERTIDE* is by far Charles Sheffield's best novel to date. Reminiscent of Arthur C. Clarke and Greg Bear, it establishes him in the front rank of SF writers.

26 April £13.95



UK Books Received

December 1989-January 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Poul. **Tau Zero**. "VGSF Classics 38." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04617-1, 190pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1970; one of many titles listed in David Pringle's *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* [1985] which have now been reprinted in Gollancz paperback.) 14th December.

Asprin, Robert Lynn, and Lynn Abbey, eds. **Thieves' World, Book 7: The Death of Winter**. Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-178-9, 273pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-world fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1985.) Late entry: published in November, but received by us in December.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley**. Edited by Martin H. Greenberg. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0465-8, 397pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1985.) 25th January.

Brooke-Rose, Christine. **Verbivore**. Carcanet, ISBN 0-85635-853-3, 196pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *Xorandor*.) 22nd February.

Burgess, Anthony. **Any Old Iron**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-965830-5, 386pp, paperback, £3.50. (Novel of modern European life which uses the continued existence of King Arthur's sword Excalibur, the "old iron" of the title, as a fantastic motif; first published in 1989.) 1st February.

Caidin, Martin. **Beamriders**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30980-3, 411pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989 [the original edition had an exclamation mark in the title]; a hard-sf thriller written in thick-ear bestseller style, it begins: "My God, what a body. What breasts! And those legs! Ah, that tiny waist. Oh, what I could do with this woman!") 9th February.

Caldecott, Moyra. **The Son of the Sun**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-959860-4, 297pp, paperback, £3.50. (Historical novel about ancient Egypt, first published in 1986; this edition is revised.) 18th January.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Ancient Images**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-967340-1, 299pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1989.) 18th January.

Card, Orson Scott. **The Folk of the Fringe**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3637-4, 243pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1989; five connected stories set in a post-bomb America; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 8th March.

Carey, Diane. **Dreadnought!** "Star Trek 29." Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-211-4, 252pp, paperback, £2.95. (Shared-universe sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) Late entry: published in November, but received by us in December.

Chalker, Jack L. **The Labyrinth of Dreams: Book 1 of G.O.D. Inc.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-50807-2, 320pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 4th January.

Cherryh, C. J. **Hunter of Worlds**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0212-7, 254pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1977.) 8th March.

Cherryh, C. J. **Rimrunners**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-52536-8, 288pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a simultaneous trade paperback edition exists [not seen].) 1st February.

Chin, M. Lucie. **The Fairy of Ku-She**. "A magical tale of ancient China." Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617823-5, 265pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 8th February.

Claremont, Chris. **First Flight**. "World-famous comics author of X-Men and Excalibur." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31151-4, 243pp, paperback, £?? (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; one of the first of the new-look Pan sf paperbacks; US pb edition received, plus UK cover.) April.

Constantine, Storm. **The Monstrous Regiment**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-356-19089-7, 344pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 8th March.

Costello, Matt. **Revolt on Majipoor: A Crossroads Adventure in the World of Robert Silverberg's Majipoor**. Introduction by Robert Silverberg. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4437-5, 243pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy gamebook, first published in the USA, 1987.) 25th January.

Daley, Brian. **Jinx on a Terran Inheritance: A Hobart Floydt-Alacrity Fitzhugh Adventure**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20678-7, 412pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; sequel to *Requiem for a Ruler of Worlds*.) 25th January.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **Demons and Dreams: The Best Fantasy and Horror 2**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-3639-0, 579pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror and fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; it contains an extremely generous selection of the best short stories of 1988, including two from *Interzone*; recommended.) 22nd February.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **Demons and Dreams: The Best Fantasy and Horror 2**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-972360-3, 579pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Horror and fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; near-simultaneous trade-pb edition of the above hardcover book.) 15th February.

Dever, Joe, and John Grant. **Hunting Wolf: The Legends of Lone Wolf, Book 4**. Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-963780-4, 304pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel based on a gamebook series, first edition.) 15th February.

Duncan, Dave. **The Reluctant Swordsman: Book One of The Seventh Sword**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965640-X, 326pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 15th February.

Ecklar, Julia. **The Kobayashi Maru**. "Star Trek 30." Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-212-2, 254pp, paperback, £2.95. (Shared-universe sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988 [?].) December.

Eddings, David. **The Diamond Throne: The Elenium, Book One**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13448-8, 396pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 8th February.

Eisenstein, Phyllis. **Sorcerer's Son**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13526-3, 379pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1979 [not "1989" as the publishers so misleadingly imply]; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 8th February.

Farris, John. **The Axeman Cometh**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-52226-7, 160pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Horror novella, first published in the USA, 1989.) 15th February.

Flint, Kenneth C. **Isle of Destiny: A Novel of Ancient Ireland**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-40037-1, 438pp, paperback, £3.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; this is actually the US edition with a British price and ISBN labelled on the back.) 19th January.

Friedman, Michael Jan. **A Call to Darkness**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation 9." Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-214-9, 274pp, paperback, £2.95. (Shared-universe sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) Late entry: published in November, but received by us in December.

Gallagher, Stephen. **Rain**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-52460-4, 244pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Thriller by a highly praised author who has graduated from the sf and horror fields; first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the press release which comes with the book is a bit of an embarrassment: "Stephen Gallagher has been around. He [is] a straightforward, affable, OK-looking young man... What is it that makes people so compelled to Gallagher's type of storytelling? 'Bugged if I know,' is the author's response.") 1st February.

Giger, H. R. **Giger's Alien**. Foreword by Timothy Leary. Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-219-X, 76pp, trade paperback, £14.95. (Art book, commenting on the making of the movie *Alien*; first published in 1979, but here apparently updated.) Late entry: published in November, but received by us in December.

Harpur, Patrick. **Mercurius, or The Marriage of Heaven and Earth**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-43781-0, 478pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel [or perhaps alchemical science fiction], first edition; proof copy received.) 8th March.

Hawke, Simon. **The Dracula Caper**. "The Time Wars." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3338-1, 212pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; this is the eighth in a rather silly time-travel series which began with *The Ivanhoe Gambit*.) 22nd February.

Herbert, Frank, and Bill Ransom. **The Ascension Factor**. "The final volume in the Pandora trilogy." Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4440-5, 381pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 25th January.

Hickman, Stephen F. **The Lemurian Stone**. Collins/Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617824-3, 342pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 11th January.

Holdstock, Robert. **Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20760-0, 475pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988; sequel to *Mythago Wood*.) 25th January.

Holdstock, Robert. **Mythago Wood**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-06585-7, 319pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1984; co-winner of the 1986 World Fantasy Award.) 25th January.

Johnson, Shane. **Star Trek: The Worlds of the Federation**. Illustrated by the author and Don Ivan Punctatz. Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-215-7, 157pp, trade paperback, £8.95. (Guide to worlds and alien life-forms featured in the *Star Trek* TV-and-movie series; first published in the USA, 1988 [?].) Late entry: published in September, but received by us in December.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Bad Place**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0222-2, 372pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; proof copy received.) 19th March.

Lawhead, Stephen. **Empyrian: The Search for Ferra, The Siege of Dome**. "An epic SF fantasy in two parts." Lion Publishing, ISBN 0-7459-1872-7, 900pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF omnibus, first published in the USA, 1985 and 1986.) 23rd February.

Lepine, Mike, and Mark Leigh. **The Naughty 90s**. "Astounding predictions for the next ten years!" Arrow, ISBN 0-09-969630-4, unpaginated [approx. 200pp], paperback, £4.50. (Scurrilous joke book, first edition; by the authors of *How to Be a Complete Bastard*.) 18th January.

Lindholm, Megan. **The Reindeer People**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440610-X, 266pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 15th January.

Lovecraft, H. P., and August Derleth. **The Lurker at the Threshold**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04685-6, 196pp, paperback, £3.50. (Supernatural horror novel, first published in the USA, 1945; it's reputed to be almost entirely the work of Derleth.) 14th December.

Lunan, Duncan, ed. **Starfield: The Anthology of Science Fiction by Scottish Writers**. Introduction by Angus MacVicar. Orkney Press [12 Craigiefield Park, St Ola, Kirkwall, Orkney, Scotland], ISBN 0-907618-21-9, 211pp, hardcover, £10.95. (SF anthology, first edition; contains reprinted material by Chris Boyce, Edwin Morgan and others, plus what appear to be original stories by Alasdair Gray, William King, Naomi Mitchison, etc.) Late entry: published some time in the autumn of 1989, but received by us in January 1990.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Dragonsdawn**. "The First Chronicle of Pern." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13098-2, 473pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 19th January.

McQuay, Mike. **Memories**. "The millennia-spanning masterpiece of time travel." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3386-1, 400pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 25th January.

Martin, George R. R., ed. **Wild Cards, Volume Three: Jokers Wild**. Titan Books, ISBN 1-85286-176-2, 374pp, paperback, £3.95. (Shared-world sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1987.) Late entry: published in November, but received by us in December.

Martine-Barnes, Adrienne. **The Rainbow Sword**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3410-8, 212pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; set in a Europe in which Islam and Greek Orthodox Christianity do not exist, it's presumably a sequel to the author's *The Fire Sword* and *The Crystal Sword*, though the publishers don't actually say so.) 22nd February.

Matthews, Rodney. **Last Ship Home**. Text by Nigel Suckling. *Dragon's World/Paper Tiger*, ISBN 1-85028-095-9, 134pp, trade paperback, £8.95. (SF/fantasy art book, first edition; a simultaneous hardcover edition exists [not seen].) Late entry: published 30th November, but received by us in December.

Moorcock, Michael. **Casablanca**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04528-0, 267pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF/fantasy/non-fiction collection, first edition; contains six short stories, a short novel [a revision of *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*, 1980] and 17 essays and reviews.) 14th December.

Niven, Larry, and Steven Barnes. **The Barsoom Project**. "No. 1 bestselling authors of

Footfall" [actually, it was Jerry Pournelle who co-authored *Footfall* with Niven]. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31568-4, 340pp, hardcover, £?? (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Dream Park*; this will be the first of the Pan hardcover sf titles; copy of the US pb edition received, plus UK dustjacket.) April.

Perry, Steve. **Conan the Defiant**. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0306-6, 245pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; this is the 31st book in the ongoing series devoted to Robert E. Howard's most famous creation; general editor Robert Jordan provides "A Conan Chronology" as an afterword.) 25th January.

Pollack, Rachel. **Alqua Dreams**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-966340-6, 246pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 18th January.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Escape from Kathmandu**. Unwin Hyman, ISBN 0-04-440624-X, 314pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1989; four linked stories about the Yeti, Shangri-La and other mountainous mysteries; amusing and well written.) 25th January.

Rosenberg, Joel. **Not for Glory**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20702-3, 253pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1988; it appears to be a Zionist contribution to the space-mercenary sub-genre.) 8th February.

Silverberg, Robert. **At Winter's End**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-966840-8, 491pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 18th January.

Silverberg, Robert. **Downward to the Earth**. "VGSF Classics 40." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04734-8, 190pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1971.) 25th January.

Silverberg, Robert. **Project Pendulum**. "A Millennium Book." Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-962460-5, 139pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; this series, which also includes novels by David Gerrold, Katherine Kurtz and Roger Zelazny, is yet another production of "Byron Preiss Visual Publications.") 1st February.

Simak, Clifford D. **The Autumn Land and Other Stories**. Edited and introduced by Francis Lyall. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0185-6, 172pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF collection, first edition; six pieces, ranging from "Rule 18" [1938] to the title story [1971]; most are previously uncollected in this country, although "Jackpot" [1956] was in the classic *Aliens for Neighbours* volume [1961].) 1st February.

Simmons, Dan. **Carrión Comfort**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0237-0, 690pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; proof copy received; it has been described by Edward Bryant as "the best horror novel, the best SF novel and the best suspense novel of the year.") 26th April.

Spencer, John. **Perspectives: A Radical Examination of the Alien Abduction Phenomenon**. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-18677-6, 255pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Non-fiction study of UFOlogy, first edition [?]; it appears to be a highly sceptical book, and probably won't appeal to the credulous.) 25th January.

Springer, Nancy. **Godbond: Sea King Trilogy 3**. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4439-1, 278pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 25th January.

Stableford, Brian. **Invaders from the Centre**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-50103-5,

256pp, paperback, £2.99. (SF novel, first edition; sequel to *Journey to the Centre*.) 4th January.

Steele, Allen M. **Orbital Decay**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-974190-3, 414pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this mass-market pb edition actually precedes by one week the hardcover edition listed in last issue's "UK Books Received.") 15th February.

Straub, Peter. **Mystery**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13655-3, 548pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Crime novel by a bestselling horror-story writer, first published in the USA, 1990.) 8th February.

Strickland, Brad. **Nul's Quest**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3343-8, 274pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Moon Dreams*.) 25th January.

Strieber, Whitley. **Majestic**. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-18681-4, 317pp, hardcover, £12.95. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; Strieber continues to pump the UFO theme, this time with a fictional treatment of an allegedly true incident from 1947.) 8th February.

Taylor, Bernard. **The Moorstone Sickness**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20698-1, 235pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1982.) 8th February.

Tryon, Thomas. **The Night of the Moonbow**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-51333-0, 320pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror [?] thriller by a movie actor turned bestselling novelist; we're not sure that this one really falls in our area, but we've been sent it for review.) 7th February.

Vance, Jack. **The Grey Prince**. (Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04646-5, 160pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA as *The Gray Prince*, 1974.) 25th January.

Vinge, Vernor. **Tatja Grimm's World**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30707-X, 277pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA as *Grimm's World*, 1969; Vinge's debut novel; this edition reprints the expanded 1987 American text.) 12th January.

Vinge, Vernor. **The Witling**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30709-6, 220pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1976.) 12th January.

Warrington, Freda. **The Rainbow Gate**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-49149-8, 381pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 4th January.

Watson, Ian. **Miracle Visitors**. "VGSF Classics 39." Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04645-7, 239pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in 1978.) 25th January.

Wiggins, Marianne. **John Dollar**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012675-9, 234pp, paperback, £4.99. (Non-sf "adventure" novel which bears some resemblance to Golding's *Lord of the Flies*; first published in 1989.) 1st February.

Wilhelm, Kate. **The Dark Door**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04695-3, 248pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1988; it's actually a crossover between the author's usual brand of sf and her crime-novel series which began with *The Hamlet Trap* and *Smart House*.) 8th February.

Womack, Jack. **Terraplane**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440616-9, 227pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; "hits the ground running, and the pace doesn't slacken for a moment" — *Interzone*; so it says on the cover.) 22nd February.

Wright, T. M. **A Manhattan Ghost Story**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04684-8, 381pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 25th January.

Zelazny, Roger. **A Dark Travelling**. "A Millennium Book." Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-960970-3, 109pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 1st February.

Magazines Received

December 1989-January 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by *Interzone* during the period specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seamount.)

Aboriginal Science Fiction no. 19, January-February 1990. 68pp. Ed. Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA. Bimonthly fiction magazine. US quarto size, with some full-colour illustrations. Contributors: George Alec Effinger, Frederik Pohl, etc. \$14 per annum, USA; \$17 overseas.

British Fantasy Newsletter vol. 15 no. 3, Winter 1989-90. 52pp. Ed. Peter Coleborn, 46 Oxford Rd., Acoccks Green, Birmingham B27 6DT. Irregular fanzine for members of the British Fantasy Society. A5 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Allen Ashley, Di Wathen, etc. Membership of the BFS: £10 per annum, UK; \$24, USA; send to BFS, Secretary Di Wathen, 15 Stanley Rd., Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE.

Cerebreton no. 8, undated (received in December 1989). 52pp. Ed. Alex Bardy, who hides his address well. "An amateur magazine dedicated to science-fiction RPGs and plenty of other SF nuttiness." A4 size, with laminated cover and black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Warren Kilby, Scott Wilson, etc. £6 for four issues (we found the address eventually, buried away at the bottom of page 5: it's 28b Gladsmuir Rd., Archway, London N19 3JX).

Critical Wave no. 14, December 1989. 24pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly sf-and-fantasy news magazine. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Steve Green, David Sutton, Andrew Darlington, etc. £5 per annum, UK; \$10, USA.

Critical Wave no. 15, February 1990. 24pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly sf-and-fantasy news magazine. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Jane Johnson, Andrew Darlington, etc. £5 per annum, UK; \$10, USA.

Dream Science Fiction no. 22, Winter 1989. 80pp. Ed. George P. Townsend, 7 Weller Place, High Elms Rd., Downe, Orpington, Kent BR6 7JW. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A5 size, with black-and-white illustrations (currently the best-produced of the British small-press mags — apart from the horror title, *Dagon*). Contributors: Keith Brooke, Neil McIntosh, John Light, etc. £7 per annum, UK; £8, overseas (payable to the publisher, Trevor Jones, 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE.)

Fear no. 13, January 1990. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Monthly horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (seven stories this time, some of

them by very young authors). A4 size, with some colour illustrations. Contributors: Guy N. Smith, Nicola Germain, etc., plus interviews with Robert Bloch, Mark Morris and others. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe. (Note: the cover price has risen recently from £1.50 to £1.95, so the annual subscription rates given here are a bargain.)

Fear no. 14, February 1990. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Monthly horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (eight stories this time). A4 size, with some colour illustrations. Contributors: Ian Watson, etc., plus interviews with J. G. Ballard, Richard Matheson and others. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe. (Note: the Ballard interview, which is part one of two parts, was conducted by *Interzone's* editor, David Pringle, in 1988; nice to see it in print at last.)

Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction no. 46, Autumn 1989 (received in January 1990). 104pp. Ed. Edward James, c/o The SF Foundation, Polytechnic of East London, Longbridge Rd., Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS. Thrice-yearly critical journal of high quality. A5 size, perfect bound. Contributors: M. John Harrison, Brian Stableford, etc. £8.50 for three issues, UK; \$17, USA.

Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field no. 348, January 1990. 72pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover. Contributors: Fritz Leiber, Edward Bryant, etc. plus Ursula Le Guin and Charles Sheffield interviews. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 seamount or \$50 airmail, Europe. (UK agent: Fantast [Medway] Ltd., PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU.)

New York Review of Science Fiction no. 16, December 1989. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, etc., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly critical magazine. US quarto size, with no illustrations. Contributors: Robert Killheffer, Alexei & Cory Panshin, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36 overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

New York Review of Science Fiction no. 17, January 1990. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, etc., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly critical magazine. US quarto size, with no illustrations. Contributors: Frederik Pohl, Adrian Cole, Richard A. Lupoff, Brian Stableford, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36 overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

New York Review of Science Fiction no. 18, February 1990. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell, etc., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA. Monthly critical magazine. US quarto size, with no illustrations. Contributors: John M. Ford, Kathleen Spencer, Michael Swanwick, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36 overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

Peake Studies no. 3, Winter 1989. 46pp. Ed. G. Peter Winnington, Les 3 Chasseurs, 1413 Orzens, Vaud, Switzerland. Irregular critical journal devoted to the work of Mervyn Peake. A5 size, with black-and-white illustrations (very nicely produced). Contributors: John D. Cox, Veronica Kennedy, etc. Subscriptions, "on a per-page basis": £12 or \$20.

Probe no. 78, November 1989. 100pp. Ed. Neil van Niekerk, SFSa (Science Fiction South Africa), PO Box 2538, Primrose 1416, South Africa. Bimonthly sf fanzine. A5 size, with black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: various. Available to members of the society at R25 per annum. (Contains

a brief review of *Interzone*, which describes it as "possibly the best SF magazine out" — thanks.)

Science Fiction Chronicle no. 123, December 1989. 44pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Don D'Amassa, Ed Naha, Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

Science Fiction Chronicle no. 124, January 1990. 40pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: the usual. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QQ).

Science-Fiction Studies no. 49, November 1989. 160pp. Ed. Robert M. Philmus & Charles Elkins, c/o English Dept., Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke St. W., Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada. Thrice-yearly critical journal of rigorous academic standard. Book-shaped (22.7 cm by 15.2 cm), with no illustrations. Contributors: George Slusser, Arthur B. Evans, etc. (this issue is mainly devoted to French sf). \$14 per annum, USA; \$16.50, overseas (payable to "SFS Publications").

Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association no. 153, December-January 1989-90. 24pp. Eds. Boyd Parkinson & Kev McVeigh, 11 Marsh St., Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 2AE. Bimonthly critical fanzine for the members of the BSFA. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Paul Kincaid, Charles Stross (an interview with Lewis Shiner and Greg Bear), etc. Membership of the BSFA: £10 per annum; \$20 (or \$35 air), USA; send to British Science Fiction Association, Joanne Raine (Membership Secretary), 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (Note: this issue came bundled with *Matrix* no. 85, a 24pp newsletter, ed. Maureen Porter; and *Paperback Inferno* no. 81, a 16pp review of paperbacks, ed. Andy Sawyer.)

Visions: The Intercollegiate Magazine of Speculative Fiction and Fantasy vol. 4, no. 1, 1989 (received in December). Ed. Wolfgang H. Baur, 409 College Ave., Ithaca, NY 14850, USA. Semi-professional fiction magazine, frequency unspecified. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: various student authors from the USA, USSR and elsewhere, plus interviews with Marion Zimmer Bradley and Boris Strugatsky. \$3.50 per copy, USA; £1.95, UK. (It's billed as the "First Joint Soviet Issue." The UK representative is Neal Tringham, 71 Victoria Rd., Walley Range, Manchester M16 8DG.)

Note: all sf, fantasy and horror magazines for listing in the above column should be sent to *Interzone's* main address. I'm afraid that we only have space at present to include English-language publications. (DP)

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We have already been going for over eight years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifetime subscribers" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £230 (UK); \$220 or equivalent (overseas); \$400 or equivalent (overseas air mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

THIS ISSUE'S COVER

David A. Hardy's cover painting for the present issue of *Interzone* is entitled "Enceladus Probe."

It is typical of many spacescapes which Hardy has executed over the past thirty years. Examples, together with reproductions of works by numerous other artists, can be found in his recent book **Visions of Space: Artists Journey Through the Cosmos**, published by Dragon's World/Paper Tiger at £16.95. It's a lavish, large-format volume of 176 pages, and we recommend it to all those who are interested in technically accurate "space art."

Interaction

In place of our normal letter column, here's a selection of brief comments from our 1989-90 Readership Survey returns:

"Go monthly! Your magazine has always been diverse and interesting. The quality of the fiction improves with every issue. Only Asimov's and *F&SF* are better. *Interzone* consistently receives my vote as the #1 semi-prozine" – George Ware, Dayton, Maryland.

"I bought Asimov's *SF Magazine* recently (out of curiosity) and am more impressed than ever with *Interzone*. I'm an sf reader who lapsed a few years ago – it's a compliment that IZ rekindled my interest. Keep up the good work!" – P. Jones, Carmarthen.

"I am continually impressed by the unsurpassed quality of half or more of the stories in every issue. Fine writing, ideas with depth, interesting perspectives...very exciting compared with the tendency in American sf to go with the flow and emphasize superficial aspects of characters, technology and so on. Bravo!" – Andy Watson, Englewood, Colorado.

"I think *Interzone* is a complete dog on the visual level. Never mind, though; I'd rather you shifted more copies! You're still being too nice. I daresay the sf coterie is as cosily incestuous as any other literary world, but let's have a little more assertion" – Roger Thomas, Amersham, Bucks.

"Although *Interzone* has improved as a complete magazine, I do feel that some of the fiction in recent issues has not been very memorable. For this reason, I would oppose the change to monthly publication (even though I would continue to support you if you do change)" – Allan Lloyd, Eardsley, Hereford.

"*Interzone* has evolved into the BEST speculative fiction magazine since *New Worlds*; we have nothing to match it in the US. I've followed IZ since #1 – you now have an excellent mix of fiction/film coverage/book & author coverage – PLEASE DON'T TAMPER WITH IT!" – Michael A. Morrison, Norman, Oklahoma.

"*Interzone* can be a good remedy for the boredom induced by various hippies, anoraks and wargamers who insist on worshipping at the feet of Tolkien, Asimov, Adams or Pratchett. However, I sometimes find myself yawning when, yet again, these names crop up in your pages. More of the different and experimental, less of the clichéd and the populist, please" – Ian Williamson, Bradford.

"Excellent stories. The magazine as a whole has a good 'feel' to it. My only suggestion as to any improvement would be perhaps some longer stories serialized in not more than 4-6 parts" – B. J. Redworth, Yiewsley, Middx.

"My subscription began with issue 32, but on the strength of that issue alone I know I shall be a long-time subscriber. When I read

my first copy of *Interzone*, I resolved to renew my sub. I've been reading sf for almost 30 years, and I know a winner when I see one" – Marc Maurus, Redford, Michigan.

"Best features include: the John Clute experience – like being mugged by the Times crossword; fiction – variety, quality, new names" – Chris Poote, Swansea.

"As the local Reference Librarian I purchase IZ specifically for book reviews, just as I buy *Poetry Review*. The fact that I like to read both is, of course, entirely coincidental" – J. E. Starbuck, St Helens.

"More J. G. Ballard and Gene Wolfe please. Readers' Letters is often absolutely hilarious (more in-fighting and general bitching is welcome)" – Andrew Josey, Culbokie, Ross and Cromarty.

"I think the artwork is almost always appalling, and should be dropped. The covers are often good, but suffer by the tacky presentation – take a look at the cover of *Fear* to see how it should be done" – Craig Turner, Saf-fron Walden.

"I love John Clute and the other reviewers – almost as good as *Foundation*, which is the best in the business" – Jeremy Cramp-ton, Pennsylvania.

"Wonderful magazine, very popular with the Society – much in demand" – Bristol University SF Society.

"Monthly please! I was really pleased to come across *Interzone*. It has the sort of stories I think I've missed, somehow, for years. Anybody who criticizes sf on literary grounds ought to be put to rights by it" – R. P. Fraser, Hinckley.

"I applaud what *Interzone* is trying to do, but do so many of the stories have to be so downbeat? While *Analog*-style 'wunnerful future' may be monotonous, there must be a few more positive things to say about it" – Tim Brandt, RAF Geilenkirchen.

"How about appealing more to women readers (like me) with more fantasy? It isn't all rubbish – and a lot of streetwise cyberpunk is!" – E. M. Robinson, East Grinstead.

"Like music with that certain beat or a cup of tea in the afternoon, I find your magazine positively uplifting and necessary. Go ahead, publish monthly, never lower your standards" – Anon (female, software engineer, early twenties)

"Living sandwiched between the Nullarbor and the Indian Ocean, I might as well be on Mars for the amount of information that seeps into Karrinyup. I am very grateful to your magazine for providing authors' names and book titles, so that I can try and order them from Western Australian bookshops" – Belinda Ireland, Karrinyup, W.A.

"Since I've read in the last two years mainly sf written by West German authors – the bulk of them without much narrative or stylistic skill, with only three or four exceptions – it's a delight to read *Interzone*. In fiction only Asimov's may match your

magazine, but Dozois hasn't got the quality of *IZ*'s comment columns" – Christian A. Mathioschek, Duisburg, W. Germany.

"I met a man from Derby. By chance we started to talk about sf. He said discovering *IZ* in a newsagent's was 'a godsend when you live in the sticks.' He especially appreciates the Books Received lists, so he knows what to look out for. He likes reading short stories. But he said when he received this survey he looked down the list of stories published in 1989 and he couldn't remember a single one. Wouldn't have happened in my day" – Colin Greenland (ex-*IZ* editor), South Harrow, Middlesex.

"I recently dug out some early *Interzones* to re-read the stories. There is no comparison in the quality of the zine. The present publication is superior in every way!" – Robert Day, Coventry.

"There is a carefully nurtured rumour being promulgated that *Interzone* is going soft, that it has sold out. (See Vector 153 editorial for a recent example.) Please ignore it. It simply isn't true. Recent issues have been better written, more readable, more broadly based, than ever. *IZ* is our only major sf mag. It is too precious to be the sole preserve of the avant-garde" – Stuart Falconer, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

"*IZ* is still managing to find interesting/offbeat sf at a time when the field as a whole is going downhill – how do you manage it? I particularly liked the stories by Ballard, Redd, Montgomerie, Lee and Aramaki. My only complaint: 'Books Received' is a waste of space – drop it and run more fiction" – Graham Sleight, Purley, Surrey.

"The non-fiction has gone from strength to strength. It's my opinion that *Interzone* does more to 'promote' science fiction in this country than the British SF Association!" – Mike Huggins, Exeter.

"More non-English original sf stories; maybe geographically oriented issues, like 'European,' 'Eastern,' 'North/South American' – even Scandinavian themes" – Lars-Arne Karlsson, Ullared, Sweden.

"The quality of *IZ* is pretty good. I enjoy reading the idiosyncratic 'Comment' column by Charles Platt and would like to see a 'Guest Comment' column where other writers (and maybe scientists) could be invited to air their views about sf, the world, the future, etc." – David Hardman, Welling, Kent.

"Best feature by far: Nick Lowe. The only thing that made sitting through *Slipstream* tolerable was the knowledge that I would be able to read and better appreciate his review. It was almost worth it. Worst feature by far: John Clute. Does anyone understand him?" – M. Peirce, Worthing.

"Improve your Word Power with John Clute! Keep him in – he's still the sharpest critic around (if a little verbose). Otherwise, perhaps a bit more non-fiction – without cutting down on the fiction. And less Platt" – Ian Sales, Mansfield.

"Unaware of this magazine until seen in library – why don't good newsagents carry this

in stock? Come on, publishers, wake up to the public's demand" – Mrs C. E. Richards, East Kilbride.

"I have only read one issue (number 32). As a newcomer, I was very impressed with the standard of fiction, the quality of non-fiction articles and the general layout (printing, artwork, etc.). Congratulations and best wishes for the future" – Martin J. Savage, Dundee.

"I find it hard to fault the magazine – its contents are devoured as soon as I receive it. Perhaps a few more US 'name' authors would widen its appeal" – W. Trimble, Bangor, N. Ireland.

"How about a J. G. Ballard special issue? Stories by Ballard, critical articles on Ballard and an interview with him" – William Wood, Nottingham.

"Nick Lowe's 'Mutant Popcorn' is now consistently the first thing I turn to. The guy's a few frames short of a full reel, but he remains one of the best film writers around" – John Feetenby, Leeds.

"Generally pretty awful in the last year, but seemed to improve just before I had to resubscribe. I don't know what's wrong. I've always measured the mag by its fiction, which I've found increasingly tedious, pretentious, juvenile. Maybe I'm getting old" – Anon (male, late twenties).

"Go monthly as soon as possible! So: more stories, more reviews, basically more *Interzone*!" – Chris Amies, London.

"I feel that *Interzone* is well worth the money. However, there are some things I would love to see: articles on the history of science fiction – pieces on certain topics, i.e. 'Women in the Sci-Fi Story,' 'The Evolution of Fantasy' – topical articles on sci-fi in other countries, in Australia, Africa (?), S. America, etc." – Geoff Brown, Carshalton, Surrey.

"I knew of *Interzone* long before I first read it (issue 32) and always assumed it would be really crappy, a few photocopied sheets stapled together. I was amazed by the quality of the product and the contents. If more people were aware that it's a high-quality product, I'm sure sales would soar" – Anon (male, computer programmer, late twenties).

"I teach a creative writing class, and use *Interzone* to illustrate ways writers can free their imaginations... I particularly like the idea of 'theme writing' – as with your gender issue (29). Above all, the fiction is the most important element of the magazine – please don't strangle it in a surfeit of news and reviews" – Eileen Shaw, Leeds.

"Where have you been all my life? More stories please! They're more fun than endless reviews. P.S. I voted with my hormones on issue 29 – that was a good one!" – A. Mitchell (female), Oxford.

"As an intelligent, brave magazine (crawl, crawl), *Interzone* should be encouraging unusual and original art for the cover instead of the blatantly commercial, utterly

formulaic cover art it currently employs. If I want to see that stuff all I have to do is go to a bookshop and gaze at the sf shelves" – China Mieville, Huntingfield, Suffolk.

"I just wish I'd come across this magazine before issue 30. I enjoy the reviews, but... could you possibly bring out an 'Interzone Reviewers' Dictionary of Cliches and Garble' or possibly initiate a 'Reviewers' Longest Sentence of the Year' competition?" – Simon Brown, Camborne, Cornwall.

"I presume you'll be sticking with John Clute, despite the persistent knocking – best bit of the mag for me. I admit he's a bit of a Delphic oracle, mouthing certain truth in unfathomable metaphor, but I'm working on the assumption that he's brilliant till proven guilty" – Camilla Pomeroy, Swansea.

"Deliver any message via a stiletto, not a bludgeon. Stop pushing Brian Stableford. Don't pander to nameism. Use more upbeat material (featuring fewer wimps) and cut down on wetware" – John Duffield, Hertford.

"I've only recently become a subscriber to *Interzone*, having discovered it courtesy of your 3rd Anthology. I was pleasantly surprised by your magazine's engaging coverage of non-fiction issues, and the fact that these items did not result in a lowering of fiction 'volume' or quality" – Gerald Griffith, Leicester.

"Have only seen two issues, yet it was love at first sight, so do not change too much. Excellent balance between fiction and non-fiction" – Cathie Gill, Methlick, Aberdeenshire.

Interface

Continued from page 4

INTERZONE'S BEST-LIKED FEATURES

So it seems **Brian Stableford** is our most popular non-fiction feature writer of the past year, as well as the author of the winning short story. Double congratulations to him. Among our regular non-fiction columns and features, not included in the above poll results, the "Interface" (editorial & news) column came first, with a score of 167 points, but this was closely followed by "Book reviews in general," with 165. We take both these results to mean that you do like to see copious news and reviews in addition to the most important ingredients of *Interzone*: the fiction, and non-fiction essays and interviews.

Third in popularity among our regu-

lar columns was "Interaction" (readers' letters), with 139 points; and fourth was "Mutant Popcorn" (Nick Lowe's film reviews), with 122. Then came Paul McAuley's book reviews (108) and Ken Brown's reviews (88). I'm particularly gratified to report that the "UK Books Received" column scored 81 points (among those who bothered to comment, 120 people approved of it, while 39 disapproved), which seems to indicate that this feature has now settled into its niche: overseas readers in particular clearly value it.

The most controversial of our regular columnists are Charles Platt (whose "Comment" column gained 73 points) and John Clute (whose lead book-review column gained 55 points). Both came relatively low in the final scoring because their positive votes were eroded by large numbers of negatives. (This may be taken by some people as a sure sign of success.) Nevertheless, both received a substantially larger number of approvals than disapprovals from our readers.

OTHER SURVEY RESULTS

We'll bring more news of the questionnaire responses to you next issue: matters such as the age, sex and occupation of the typical *Interzone* reader, and his or her interests and tastes. (See this issue's "Interaction" column for some selected comments from readers.)

For the time being, let me say that it comes as no surprise to us that the average subscriber to this magazine seems to be male, aged 27, works in computing, and lives in Reading, Berks. He also aspires to be a science-fiction writer, and occasionally reads the *Guardian* and the *New Scientist* but wouldn't be seen dead with the *Times*. (Perhaps surprisingly, he is not a member of the British SF Association, and doesn't regularly read sf magazines apart from *Interzone*.) We more-or-less

knew all this already, and thought possibly it had changed – but it still seems to be true.

RECESSION – WHAT RECESSION?

The readers' poll results have left little space for other news this issue, but here are a few items on the British sf publishing scene, which continues to be extremely active despite recent gloomy predictions.

The latest sf author to leave the august house of Victor Gollancz Ltd is Brian Aldiss, whose forthcoming novel, *Dracula Unbound*, and non-fiction book, *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's*, have both been sold to Hodder & Stoughton. I've also heard it rumoured that Robert Silverberg has been lured away from Gollancz to Grafton Books. So, within the last few months, Aldiss, Ballard, Bear, Moorcock and Silverberg have all left what used to be regarded as Britain's leading hardcover science-fiction publisher – a sad tale.

On the other hand, Ian Watson has just sold a new sf novel to Gollancz, so all is not lost. (Watson has also written a zestful "Warhammer 40,000" novel for me at G. W. Books, Brighton, and it should be out very soon, along with further titles from Kim Newman and Brian Stableford.) Novels which Gollancz definitely will be publishing this year include two interesting collaborations: *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman (May) and *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (announced for May but delayed until at least September).

Other publishers are strengthening their sf and fantasy lists. Kathy Gale at Pan Books is launching her new hardcover-and-paperback sf list this month, with titles from Chris Claremont, Larry Niven and others (books by Pat Murphy and Eric Brown to follow). As well as Brian Aldiss, Hodder/NEL now publish Gene Wolfe – his

Soldier of Arete is forthcoming from them imminently. Also coming from NEL this year, thanks to their perceptive editor Humphrey Price, is the mass-market paperback of *Interzone: The 4th Anthology* – to be followed soon after by the first edition of *Interzone: The 5th Anthology*, which will contain original pieces by Barry Bayley and Cherry Wilder, along with a selection of the best stories from this magazine's past year.

Jane Johnson, the editor of M. John Harrison, Garry Kilworth, Geoff Ryman and other good authors at the smaller firm of Unwin/Hyman, is responsible for Colin Greenland's first sf novel, the "space extravaganza" *Take Back Plenty*, forthcoming in June. Deborah Beale, now in charge of hardcover sf at Century/Legend, has commissioned a series of original novellas, the first of which will appear this August. They include titles by Greg Bear, Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll and Lucius Shepard – with more to follow from James Morrow, Frederik Pohl and Michael Swanwick. They sound intriguing.

AN ALDISS SPECIAL...

I mentioned Brian Aldiss above. The Roger Corman movie based on his 1973 novel *Frankenstein Unbound* should be out very soon, and, as I said, Brian has written a sort of companion novel, *Dracula Unbound*, for publication towards the end of this year. I'm pleased to be able to announce that the August 1990 *Interzone* will be a special Aldiss issue, to mark his 65th birthday. We have a fine new story from him, and some oddments and surprises. That issue will be just one of many good things coming from *Interzone* over the next year. Do stay with us.

(David Pringle)

COMING NEXT ISSUE

There will be a fantasy and horror flavour to the June 1990 *Interzone* – out just one month from now! We have Kim Newman's longest and best story to date, "The Original Dr Shade." Also, an amusing sf story by Greg Egan, and a long fantasy of a type we've never published before – by new writer Simon D. Ings. And more. Plus a "Big Sellers" essay, and all our usual non-fiction features. Continue to support Britain's leading sf/fantasy magazine as it moves to a new, more frequent schedule: don't miss *Interzone* 36 when it appears in May.

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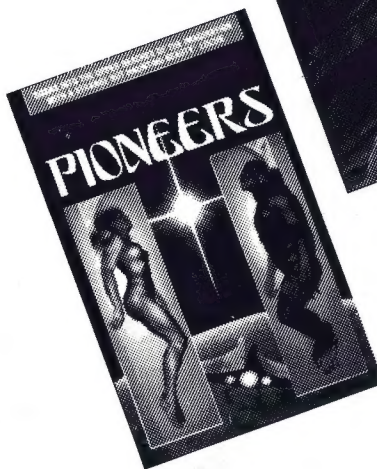
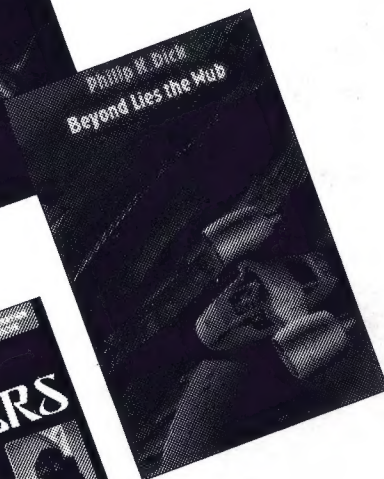
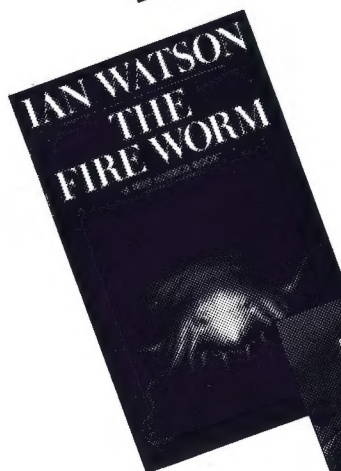
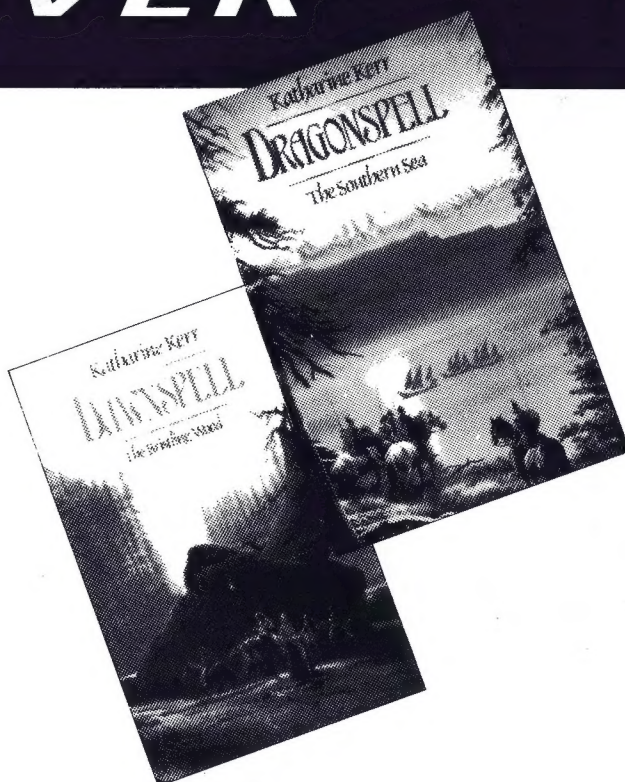
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